

Power and the Exercising Body:
A Study of Foucault and the Gym Experience

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Declaration: I declare that this is my own original work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

**For my Mum,
Alexandra Laspia.**

Thanks Go To

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	p. 10
1. Introduction	p. 11
1.1. Foucault and the Sociology of the Body	p. 11
1.1.1. The Body in Sociology	p. 11
1.1.2. Foucault and the Body	p. 14
1.1.3. Foucault and Power	p. 19
1.1.4. Foucault and the Sociology of the Body: A Closer Look	p. 21
1.1.5. My Interest in the Field	p. 27
1.1.6. Appropriations of Foucault and the Impact of Feminism: A Brief Outline	p. 28
1.1.7. The Influence of Post-Modernity on the Study of Body Matters	p. 29
1.2. The Project	p. 30
1.3. The Structure of the Study	p. 31
2. The Work of M. Foucault on Power, the Body and the Self	p. 33
2.1. Discipline and Punish	p. 34
2.1.1. The Dispersal of Power: The Example of the Power to Punish	p. 34
2.1.2. The Modern Penitentiary: Panopticism and the Other Technologies of Power	p. 39
2.1.3. Internalising Discipline, Self-Regulating Behaviour	p. 43
2.1.4. Defining Power	p. 44
2.1.5. Power and the Body	p. 48
2.1.6. Power/Knowledge: Power as a Productive Force: A First Indication	p. 50
2.1.7. The Failures of Prison Regime:	

An Ineffective Theory of Power?	p. 51
2.2. The History of Sexuality	p. 52
2.2.1. Power as a Productive Force:	
Extending the Discussion	p. 52
2.2.2. Power and the Sexual Body	p. 56
2.2.3. The Notion of Resistance	
and the Ethical Construction of the Self	p. 57
2.2.4. The Body as Work of Art	p. 64
2.3. Discipline, Sexuality and Critique	p. 65
2.4. DP and THS in Perspective	p. 73
 3. Foucault, Gender and the (Exercising) Body	 p. 75
3.1. Foucault, Feminism and the Flesh	p. 75
3.2. Taming the Body:	
A Discussion on the Gender of Power	p. 81
3.3. Power, the Body	
and the Transgression of the ‘Male Power’ Debate	p. 99
3.4. The Treatment of the Flesh beyond Obsession	p. 107
3.5. The Body beyond the Beauty Myth	p. 109
3.6. Foucault, Gender and the Body: A Summary	p. 111
 4. Studying the Body in the Gym:	
Bridging Theory and Practice	p. 113
4.1. Aims of the Project and Research Questions	p. 114
4.2. Research Strategies	p. 115
4.3. The Gym: A Core Research Choice	p. 116
4.3.1. Becoming an Insider	p. 125
4.3.2. Choosing the Specific Exercise Venues	p. 126
4.4. The Sample	p. 134
4.5. The Research Tools	p. 135
4.5.1. Observation and Its Qualities;	
and Some Ethical Concerns	p. 136

4.5.2. The Qualities of Interviewing; Some More Ethical Issues	p. 145
4.5.3. The Interview Environment and Other Related Issues	p. 152
4.6. The Participants	p. 153
4.7. The Method of Data Analysis	p. 168

5. Body/Power:

Approaching the Material, Analysing the Abstract	p. 170
5.1. The Multiple Forms of Power	p. 171
5.2. Analysing Health	p. 173
5.2.1. The Meanings of Health and the Impact of Exercise	p. 176
5.2.2. The Ideal of Health and Its Proliferation: Health as Discipline in a Foucauldian Sense	p. 183
5.2.3. The Healthy Body: The Effects of Power as Written on the Flesh	p. 191
5.3. Analysing Fitness	p. 194
5.3.1. Defining Fitness	p. 196
5.3.2. The Fit Body	p. 202
5.4. Analysing Image and Beauty	p. 205
5.4.1. Appearance and Exercise	p. 209
5.4.2. The Particulars of Appearance and the Body Beautiful	p. 211
5.4.3. Specific Cultures and the Promotion of Aesthetics	p. 214
5.5. Analysing Emotions and Pleasure	p. 216
5.5.1. The Proliferation and Promotion of Pleasure	p. 220
5.6. The Body that Society Needs	p. 221

6. Power in Operation, Discipline at Work, 'Ethical' Training and the Body as Lived

6.1. Exercise as Discipline	p. 226
6.2. The Particulars of Discipline	p. 230

6.2.1. Spatiality	p. 230
6.2.2. The Regulation of Time	p. 236
6.2.3. Regulation of Activities, Routine, Repetition	p. 237
6.2.4. Gaze and the Promotion of Discipline: The Control of the Mind, The Internalisation of Norms, The Standardisation of Behaviour	p. 239
6.3. The Effects of Disciplinary Power	p. 248
6.3.1. The Power/Knowledge Combination and Effect:	p. 250
a) Knowledge and the Negotiation of Social Mandates	p. 250
b) Excess and Non-Excess	p. 253
c) Knowledge and Resistance	p. 259
6.4. The Productive Effects of Power and Exercise on the Body	p. 261
6.5. The Lived (Material) Body	p. 263
7. In Conclusion	p. 266
7.1. A Summary of the Aims and Challenges of the Project	p. 266
7.2. Findings and Conclusions	p. 268
7.2.1. On Power as Multifaceted	p. 268
7.2.2. On Power as a Cluster of Social Forces	p. 269
7.2.3. On Bodies as Socially Shaped Materials	p. 269
7.2.4. On Power as Internalised and Mechanically Exercised	p. 270
7.2.5. On the Body that Society Needs	p. 270
7.2.6. On Power as Disciplinary but also as Productive and Resistant Force	p. 271
7.2.7. On the Body as Living and Experienced – Materiality	p. 272
7.3. The Contribution of this Study	p. 273
7.4. Suggestions for Further Research	p. 275
Appendix A	p. 276
Appendix B	p. 280

Appendix C

p. 283

Bibliography

p. 285

Abstract

This study is framed by the writings of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault on power and the body, particularly his *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and *The History of Sexuality* (1979-1990). It seeks to fill the void that these texts are said to have left as to the way we understand our bodies and their significance for our society. Our bodies are, according to Foucault, the ultimate and most important loci of the establishment and exercise of power. Power – identified in Foucault's work with changing social conditions, relations and rules – influences our attitudes towards, and the ways we treat, our bodies. Yet, Foucault is often accused of not always convincingly showing how our bodies – as affected by power – are *felt* by us and how they *live the world*. The same failing that characterises the work of Foucault seems to characterise also the field of sociology of the body; an area of knowledge that is about the body as caught up in the social order and which Foucault is credited with having founded in some way. This study seeks to redress this failing through an empirical investigation of the embodied experiences of regular gym users, using participant observation and interviews.

The main contribution of this study is twofold: First, by identifying the wide number of forces that bring people to the gym, it confirms the social character of power as presented by Foucault and further illuminates the idea of the social shaping of our bodies. But by exploring people's experiences of exercise, the study further reveals the materiality of the body, of how gym users live their bodies and how their bodies themselves live the world. Second, by looking at the variety of pains and pleasures associated with exercise and also at the *knowledges* that people gain through training, the study highlights the correctness of Foucault's argument that power should not only be seen as a repressive force but also as a productive one.

1. Introduction

1.1. Foucault and the Sociology of the Body

1.1.1. The Body in Sociology

“Mankind is a material creature” noted Robert Louis Stevenson in one of his short tales late in the 19th century (1905: 33). Decades later, the French sociologist Marcel Mauss would comment on our materiality and further clarify:

[T]he body is man’s first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man’s first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is the body (1973: 75).

Although the body has been the primary concern of literature and of a number of disciplines (such as medicine, biology and anthropology) for quite some time, the substance of mankind, for all its materiality, has in fact only recently been given the attention it deserves from the vast majority of social scientists (Brooks, 1993: 1; Lupton, 1996: 15; Latour, 2004: 205).

Yet, the belated interest of sociologists in our bodies and the shift of sociological focus to matters related to our embodiment and corporeality – namely, to what our bodies are like, what they mean to us, how we experience them as objects and as object-parts of the social world, and what they (can) do as materials of this world – has been so immense, that it has led some to talk of a growing ‘body craze’ within the discipline of sociology (Davis, 1997: 1). As a consequence, a whole new field of study has been created that has been dedicated to the investigation of our body matters from a sociological viewpoint and has come to be known as the sociology of the body.

Sociologists, one could argue, study the body as the surface of inscription of various cultural norms and messages and as a material signifier of different values of our societies. They ask, for example: What does the fact that people want to have ‘slim’ or ‘toned’ bodies mean? Why is it that they go to the gym to train, or that they have cosmetic surgery? What does the fact that excess weight is no longer

aesthetically appreciated imply? What has contributed to this change of our perceptions about what our bodies should look like compared to past eras?¹

Within this context, a number of people have attempted to find answers not only to questions regarding the social meaning of our bodies, what our bodies tell us about the worlds we live in, but also to questions regarding the understanding of our bodies as materials. But given that societies and cultures vary, given that our bodies and our experiences of them also differ and given that sociology as a discipline is characterised by much diversity, it is not surprising also to note that the particular field of sociology of the body is characterised by equally much variety of opinions. And, as I will illustrate shortly, despite its relative youth as an area of knowledge, the sociology of the body is already tormented by a number of tensions.

These tensions stem from a number of rival theoretical approaches which the discipline has been called upon to support. Considering only some of the most prominent figures in this field, reveals the variety of these radically different approaches. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968), for example, tried with his accounts of ‘body-subjects’, namely of the human beings being seen as “neither purely ‘minds’ or ‘subjects’, or conversely mere ‘bodies’” (Howson and Inglis, 2001: 303), to transgress the mind/body dualism that permeated up to his time the fields of philosophy and sociology and to make us think of the body not only as passive (simply ‘written’ or ‘acted’ upon and created by social forces) but also as active, partaking and further constitutive of social relations (Howson and Inglis, 2001: 305). More recently, Pierre Bourdieu (1992(a), 1992(b)) in developing the notion of ‘habitus’, of seeing, that is, “[t]he practices of the body – [the] ways of doing and being” as “characteristic of a class’s or class fraction’s fundamental conditions of life”, showed us how our embodied existence is part of the particular social orders within which we, as individuals, operate (Howson and Inglis, 2001: 310; also, Turner, 1996: 25). Similarly, Norbert Elias (1978(a), 1978(b)), by focusing on the ‘lived body’ of the ‘civilised’ modern subject and juxtaposing it to the lived bodies of people of past eras, demonstrated how we come to “experience ourselves and our environment through our bodies”, how we make sense of the processes that serve to make us invest more effort in the “monitoring, management and appearance” of our

¹ I will extensively discuss analogous issues in Chapter 3.

bodies (Shilling, 1993: 14-5). And Judith Butler, by introducing the idea of 'performativity', showed new ways of perceiving our material bodies and their actions as effects of ongoing discourses, of certain ways of talking about the body. She has pointed out how specific 'speech acts' lead us to 'living' and constructing bodies which comply with the understandings that these discourses create. But she has also illustrated how, through changing discourse, we can also change our perceptions about our bodies and redefine our bodies (Butler, 1993: 9).

Even more recently, a number of other scholars have taken the sociological debate on the body even further. But they have begun to discuss questions that are more concerned with the character and value of the discipline of sociology of the body itself and not only with the body as a social material. Some of the concerns of this kind that already preoccupy and divide social scientists who study corporeal matters are: How far has the practice of studying corporeality from a sociological viewpoint actually gone (Morgan and Scott, 1993: 11)? How truly embodied has sociology become (Shilling, 2000: 544; Monaghan, 1999: 268)? How truly embodied could and should it be in general (Newton, 2003: 25)? What would a really embodied sociology mean at a practical level (Shilling, 2000: 545)? What should any deeply corporeal sociological study entail? What benefits might ensue from such a material theorisation of our social world (Witz, 2000: 2)? These are some of the broader questions that I will seek to provide answers for, with this thesis.

Yet, it is not my intention to decide between all these differing approaches, whether concerned with the body as social material or the character of sociology of the body as a discipline. My intention is rather to take just one of the leading theorists in the field and subject his accounts to empirical test. This is Michel Foucault, arguably one of the most important and influential writers in this area of knowledge. Such singular and extensive treatment of his ideas seems, therefore, to require no further justification. Foucault's main contribution is that he has "placed the body at the core of [his] analysis of ... disciplinary systems" and power (Shilling, 1993: 10). In the following chapters I am going to demonstrate how Foucault's accounts develop and what the implications of his theories are.

1.1.2. Foucault and the Body

As I just mentioned, the French philosopher Michel Foucault is one of many who have contributed to the development of knowledge and to the lively debate within the field of sociology of the body. Two decades after his death sociologists still revisit his texts in their attempts to understand and interpret contemporary individuals' multifarious experiences of embodiment. His work has inspired much research, including my own, and it is his writings that I attempt to evaluate and illuminate further with this thesis.

Foucault is credited with helping to change our views about the body and advising us to notice the changing perceptions of the body in our societies. His writings on punishment and sexuality² marked a radical departure from the way the human flesh had previously been theorised (Butler, 1999(b): 307). This has been itself the effect of Foucault's unconventional appropriation of the concept of 'power'. Foucault discussed and analysed power not as a hierarchical structure or an ideology but rather as a situation or a complex of conditions and relations wherein people-as-bodies, as embodied entities, meet, interact with and relate to one another (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993: 51). He has thus introduced the talk of the body to the discipline of sociology by emphasising that we should pay attention to our bodies' actions, reactions to, interactions with or inactions to these situations and conditions, in order to understand power.

In the combined reading of his *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, one discovers a full and elaborate interpretation of this concept of power and of the actual relation between power and the body. One may find additional information and clarifications of Foucault's ideas in a number of his interviews and other essays that have been selected in the volume called: *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (1980)³.

I shall refer back to these three sets of texts throughout this thesis, in my attempt to present and interpret the experiences of embodiment and

² *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and *The History of Sexuality* (3 vols., 1979-1990); hereafter, DP and THS.

³ Hereafter, PK.

(em)power(ment) of a number of people who exercise regularly in the gym. I juxtapose my empirical research findings from the months of observation and interviews that I have conducted with twenty gym-users with Foucault's ideas.

However, although it is the aforementioned texts that I return to throughout this study, I also draw on a number of other theoretical and empirical sociological accounts of the body, in order to provide a more thorough analysis and critique of Foucault's theses, as well as a clear picture of the gym culture. I will refer to these analyses in subsequent chapters but here I outline briefly the content of *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, and give a short introduction to Foucault's arguments on the body and power.

In DP, Foucault presents the penal transformations that took place in 18th century Europe. He focuses mainly on the transition from public torture as a form of punishment to that of imprisonment and the disciplining of deviants. He attributes the occurrence of the reforms in the penal system to a number of broader socio-political changes that were happening at the time. The appearance of new penal practices and measures, he explains, were a result of changes in the structure of the state, the eclipse of the monarchy, the birth of bourgeois democracy, population growth, the accumulation of large numbers of people in the cities and the distribution of wealth to many more individuals (i.e. the risen bourgeois classes).

Foucault illustrates and analyses the practices and techniques used by the newly established prison regime for the disciplining of criminal offenders. He presents and discusses, further, the effects of operation of these techniques on the *normalisation* of deviants, the *standardisation* of their behaviours and their compliance with society's norms. He additionally talks about the dispersal of these techniques outside the limits of the prison and speaks about the impact of their operation on the disciplining of the whole population and mostly on the disciplining of people's bodies⁴.

In THS, on the other hand, particularly the introductory volume, Foucault deals with another issue – the study and control of people's sexualities during the same period. He tells us that in the 17th and 18th centuries, the examination of people's

⁴ See Chapter 2 for an extensive discussion of these concepts and issues.

sexual lives acquires an institutionalised form, being exercised mainly by doctors and other scientists. The latter, enabled by the advance of scientific knowledge of the time, 'claim' to be ready to help (and help control) and deal successfully with the problems of the growing population. They claim to know better, for instance, how to advise people on hygiene or sanitation and emphasise the necessity to study people's living conditions in general, individuals' relationships to one another in particular, and their bodies more closely, in order to help this population sustain itself and live a life of better quality and efficiency in the new conditions.

The need to study people's lives leads to an invasion of their private spheres and to the control of their conducts with one another, and more specifically their sexual conducts. Foucault illustrates though, that this invasion into people's lives did not necessarily 'limit' or 'oppress' them but that the study of individuals' behaviours and habits also produced knowledge about their capabilities and potentials, about the way people actually led their lives, about how they reacted to the regulations, about how they treated their bodies according to these regulations and about how their bodies (as materials) experienced these regulations.

One may see, then, that for Foucault the disciplinary practices of the prison and scientists' intrusions into people's private spheres as outcomes of the broader social transformations of the times, led not only to the repression of individuals, as one could at first think, but have also had a "positive value" (see Pratt, 1986). This positive value is that these regulations facilitated further the knowledge of individuals by scientists, the understanding of people's experiences of the world, the understanding of their habits, needs and capacities and created conditions wherein these habits, needs and capacities could be further studied, accommodated and attended to (Turner, 1996: 2-3).

More importantly though, the study and regulation of people's private conducts produced information about how people felt these regulations through their bodies and created new knowledge about people's bodies themselves. According to Foucault, the penal and medical transformations and the broad socio-political changes that brought them about were in fact 'written' and reflected on people's bodies. The prison techniques and the intervention into people's sexualities were written on individuals' bodies. One could see the effects of the operation of these

rules and regulations on people's bodies by looking at how people treated their bodies (for example, how they moved their bodies in the prison, how they sanitised their bodies at home or how they prepared or regulated their bodies for sexual conduct). The understanding and appreciation of these rules and regulations and the evaluation of their effects has further led to new ways of experiencing and viewing our bodies.

The societies of the time, Foucault explains, had entered a phase when it was understood that people mattered. They mattered for their ability to produce, to work in the new expanding industries, to provide their services to the administration of the new states, to vote and to support the new democratic regime and technological change. He emphasises that the various forms of regulation of people's lives were effects of such social changes that focused on maximising people's forces. This would, in effect lead to the sustainability of the regime itself in the form described just above. People would be able to produce and help the new societies advance. At the same time, it was understood that what also mattered were people's bodies as such. It was with their bodies that people could work, produce and help sustain the new political and economic order (a democratised one that depended on people), and bodies came to be given special attention. People's bodies as materials, Foucault tells us, came to be considered necessary and 'useful' (DP: 26) for the sustainability of this new regime. The flesh needed to be controlled, so that it could contribute ever more efficiently to the new structure. It was thus examined, placed under the gaze of science, justice, pedagogy and the family; it was studied, trained and regulated so that it would be able to cope with the changing circumstances around it (Turner, 1996: 5, 60).

Because the body was necessary and useful, it also needed to be protected, taken care of and looked after. It was "as an object of power produced in order to be controlled, identified and reproduced" by medicine or punishment (Turner, 1996: 63).

The pressure of men in urban space necessitate[d] a new institutional order of prisons, asylums, clinics, factories, and schools in which accumulated bodies [could] be made serviceable and safe (Turner, 1996: 162).

Thus, the 18th century became, according to Foucault, the era that established the ways in which flesh itself ultimately came to be viewed as a commodity, as a product itself, that needed to be presented always further in the best possible way for ‘consumption’ by the system⁵. People from the rising classes in particular, probably more so now than in the past, had to take responsibility for the care of their bodies. The care of their bodies came to signify more than anything else these individuals’ desire to be actively engaged in the new political order. It was an indication of their intention to support the new regime (which offered them a number of privileges compared to the past monarchical and aristocratic ones) and make it work. The care of the body implied a devotion to this regime – people needed/wanted to work, people needed/wanted to produce, people wanted to enjoy the wealth they acquired through their personal work, people wanted to be able to determine their future. And in order to be able to do all these things, they had to keep their bodies looked after, taken care of. It was only so, if their bodies were treated so, that people could be useful to the new political order. At this time, then, individuals’ bodies took value and became symbols of status and potential. As Lingis shows following Foucault (THS, vol. 1: 145), *biopolitics* (the regulation of the lives of populations for their survival and for the survival of the new political order):

[was] being formulated in the archaic terminology of rights – the right to life, to health, *to the management of one’s body*, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs (1999: 300)⁶. [Emphasis added]

The greater the care of one’s body, the greater became one’s status and personal value (also Bordo, 1990: 83). In this sense, in that era, the body also became a signifier of new identities, new personalities (e.g. the new bourgeois citizen) and new values as well as a marker of broader social changes (similar discussion in Dutton, 1995: 177). And this is why it became a commodity itself.

In other words, the bodies of the time reflected that the preservation of the new political order, which had facilitated the appearance of new views about them,

⁵ Analogous discussions of how the body itself has come to be viewed as a commodity are made by Sassatelli, 1999(b): 227; Fisher, 2002: 103; Negrin, 2002: 36.

⁶ Health, happiness, the management of one’s body are all things that I shall demonstrate in following chapters interviewees also discuss as the main aims for their subjection to training.

depended now itself entirely on the way in which these bodies were seen and treated (THS, vol. 1: 44, 114).

It is the discussion of these issues by Foucault, and particularly of the emergence and establishment of new views about the body in the 18th century, that has inspired many sociologists of the body and has contributed significantly to the overall development of this field of knowledge and to the ongoing debate within it.

I will refer to this debate shortly, in order to show where my own contribution lies too, but for now let me take a brief look at the other focal element in Foucault's work, the idea of power and how it relates to the body.

Although the connection between power and the body as presented by the French philosopher will be dealt with in more detail later in the thesis (Chapter 2), I think it is important to make a first reference to the issue now. I do this so as to demonstrate the extent to which Foucault's work may actually be classified as truly embodied sociology and explain why for some it cannot.

1.1.3. Foucault and Power

Power has for Foucault a very special meaning. To questions like: 'What exactly is power?', 'Who has it?', 'How does it become manifest?', Foucault answers in a radical manner. He presents power not as something that an individual or a group of people may possess, nor as a mechanism that presupposes the existence of some sort of sovereign who lays down a law that "limits, obstructs, refuses, prohibits and censors" (Sarup, 1993: 73). For him power is not a status one acquires, nor is it a set of rights or privileges to which one may be more entitled than others. The existence of power for Foucault is not grounded in, and does not become manifest through a dichotomy between those who have it and those who lack it. Nor is it a matter of what position one holds; it is not something one has *ex officio*. Power is always there for all. It is an element of the existence of the world. It is what enables and facilitates our being, produces and marks (social) change (DP: 26, 94; also, Fulcher and Scott, 2000: 602; Haralambos, 1985: 99, 101, 107). Power is portrayed as a machinery, or as a set of practices and techniques. It is presented as something

that each of us may operate and that none of us may be deprived of (DP: 206, THS: 95; Sarup, 1993: 79). As Burkitt notes, power, in Foucauldian terms:

is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. ... Power is more a question of government than of a network of conflicts between adversaries (1998: 496).

It is a set of dynamics. It is the dynamics that imply the existence of and are produced by social transformations and by their effects, and which themselves produce further transformations and effects. It is the set of practices in which living is regulated each time and a sum of relations produced by the administration and regulation of social affairs. Power is thus inherently social.

For Foucault, power – because it is a complex of conditions and relations – is not static or linear. It is additionally something multifaceted. It takes many forms and works in different directions. Implicitly, then, it is not solely or wholly negative (repressive, exploitative, controlling). It is something that has numerous positive effects. Power, as Foucault demonstrated with the examples of the prison and the development of the medical profession in THS, is a set of relations that creates knowledge about our daily lives, about our embodied lives, induces pleasures and liberates us (DP: 203, 251; THS: 69, 72-3, 89, 107, 157; also section 1.1.2.). As Gordon argues in his *Power/Knowledge*, when it comes to talking about Foucault and his ideas on power:

[o]ne must begin by noting the novelty of a reflection on power in terms beyond good and evil, located, that is to say, outside the fields of force of two antithetical conceptions of power whose conjunction and disjunction determine the ground rules of most modern political thought ... Foucault's initiative marks a break with th[e] shared premise that power, whether localised or invested in a monarch, a community of citizens or a class dictatorship consists in some substantive instance or agency of sovereignty (1980: 234 – 235).

Consequently, it is important to notice (and this is going to be significant later in this thesis) that for Foucault it is not the actions of those who do not have power against those who allegedly possess it that constitute 'resistance'.

1.1.4. Foucault and the Sociology of the Body: A Closer Look

I will now address the issue of Foucault's contribution to the sociology of the body. In Foucault's accounts, as I have mentioned, the human body appears as the main locus of inscription, investment by and manifestation of power (DP: 28)⁷. Foucault says that it is ultimately and always the body that is taken up in the mechanisms of power (DP: 26, 203; THS: 139). Power 'creates' the body we live in and with. He shows that our body is mainly (although not only) a social product – managed, regulated and indeed 'formed' by the social forces that *are* power.

Foucault places thus special emphasis on the necessity to appreciate our corporeality for the purpose of understanding how power functions. He argues that it is through the study of the body that we can make sense of power relations – social relations. It is through the study of the body that we may become aware of power and its techniques, of changes in power. Consequently, it is through the study of the body that we can understand society overall, its mode of operation, its needs and its aims (DP: 25, 58). As I mentioned earlier, by looking at how we treat our bodies, shape our bodies, how we sanitise them, feed them, move them, ornament them, cure them, do things and lead our lives with them, we can understand power as identified with the conditions of our social life, which enable us or force us to treat or behave with our bodies in certain ways. According to Foucault, by doing all these, we also become aware of ourselves, our position in society, our relations to others, and our abilities and capacities (THS, vol. 3: 50, 53). Thus, the body becomes for Foucault, not only a site 'written', affected, influenced, invested by power but also the medium for realising who we are – a signifier and marker of our identities (similar discussion in Budgeon, 2003: 32).

By emphasising the body/power connection and by showing especially how power can shape the flesh, Foucault breaks away from another tradition as well (apart from that which views power as something that some may possess or have access to more than others). This is the western philosophical and sociological belief that presents the human mind and soul as the basis, source and cause of all human

⁷ While the prison's aim is to correct the individual's *tendencies, inclinations* and *attitudes* (one's mind and soul), Foucault shows that it is always the body that is ultimately subjected to regulation (DP: 28).

conduct, creativity and advance but also of human despair, pain and suffering (also, Putnam, 1999: 78; Howson and Inglis, 2001: 299). This is a tradition that has left our material substance for the most part undertheorised (similarly, Davis, 1997: 3). As Turner argues:

For Foucault, the power-effects ... are not to be seen in terms of the manipulation of the human subject as pure consciousness (1996: 63).

Having spoken about the connection between body and power in Foucault's work, and having shown where his contribution to the field of the sociology of the body lies (namely, to his emphasis on the necessity of studying the body in order to understand and interpret social relations and the position of subjects in the world – see also, Latour, 2004: 227), let me now briefly address some of the issues that have recently began to be debated within the latter area of knowledge with regard to Foucault's contribution to it. These issues reflect what one might see as 'limitations' in Foucault's work.

The questions that arise are: How truly embodied is his account of power? Are his practical examples adequate to help sociologists understand how our bodies are socially produced but also to realise how they live the world? Do Foucault's writings enable us to see what the actual potentials of our bodies are? What really is the body for Foucault and what is it for sociology of the body?

Some claim (Shilling, 1993: 8), quite justifiably as I show, that although his work might have had a significant impact on the way sociologists view the body, Foucault's writings have not actually moved the study of body matters far forward. They believe that not only Foucault but also the sociological tradition overall have not managed to re-instate the body-as-material as an object of study. They argue that the French philosopher has been reluctant to engage in a full theorising of the body as substance and that his work, in reality, reveals very little about people's various experiences of their materiality – namely, of what people's bodies can do and how as entities, as objects, people's bodies experience the world. Thus, they conclude, Foucault has been unable to make a truly embodied sociology.

Indeed Foucault's definition of power as a 'cluster of relations' and his description of the 'birth of the prison' with its disciplinary practices that address the

soul and are said to make it ‘the prison of the body’ (DP: 30) seem to leave the issue of our corporeality considerably under-debated. ‘Relations’ is quite an abstract term and the philosopher’s suggestions to study the body in order to understand how these relations operate does little to bring the body fully back into the discussion. Thus the critique seems fair.

Foucault’s censors further argue that his reluctance to deal with our material bodies is an effect of the fact that Foucault presents the body primarily, if not only, as a product of social structures and relations (Shilling 2000: 20)⁸. By way of contrast, they advocate a development of sociology which will take into account and integrate the physio-biological aspects of embodiment more fully (Shilling, 1993: 106; also, 1999: 544). What they seem to suggest is that we need also to look at how our bodies behave as entities, in specific moments and in specific interaction contexts. We need to look at how our bodies may react to different situations and contexts and what their reactions might say about the bodies themselves and about how they (as objects) experience these specific contexts. In looking at these embodied reactions and their diversity, we may indeed be able to understand more about social structures in general but also about our bodies as materials. These sociologists insist that we should not ignore these aspects of embodiment. For them, the “oversocialised perceptions of man” (as are, according to them, those of Foucault) are inadequate to help establish a fully embodied sociology (Shilling, 1999: 544)⁹.

This argument also sounds logical but is – according to other analysts – too naively optimistic (see, for example, Newton, 2003: 36), because of the great

⁸ Similar acknowledgements in the work of Davis, 1997: 6; Shilling, 2001: 329; Turner, 1996: 4, 27; McKie and Watson, 2000: xxii; Horner and Keane, 2000: 2-3.

⁹ Reacting further against the limits that a purely sociological theorising of the body produces as it focuses only on ‘the determining power of social structures’ (to borrow Shilling’s phrase, 2001: 329) meant for a number of sociologists, as Howson and Inglis also inform us, that we should move “away from theoretical frameworks which privilege [such] social-structural accounts of the body” and focus on others “which privilege the body as the ‘ground’ of experience”. We should move, namely, towards the study of our lived bodies as materials of culture (2001: 298). The debate here has not to do with Foucault (in fact I believe, Foucault would agree with the necessity to not look at the body only in sociological terms and I will explain why shortly in the text) but with how well it may be understood that when it comes to studying the body, sociology proves to be often an exhausted or inadequate paradigm. It is not an ideal field on its own for a discourse on our corporeality to develop (Howson and Inglis: 314). On the possibility of a combination of different paradigms and discourses within the discipline of sociology and the benefits that this practice may have for our understanding of our lived, embodied experiences, see also, Crossley, 2001: 319, 325; Shilling, 2001: 328.

differences in perspective about the body that exist between the various disciplines that study our material substance, especially between sociology and biology, and the contradicting views within each discipline. But it has also to do with the great multiplicity of our embodied reactions (the difficulties then associated with fully knowing our material bodies as organisms but also as organisms affected by our complex social worlds) and our inability to record all these reactions. These are issues that even those who advocate for this kind of embodied sociology also understand and acknowledge (Shilling, 1993, 106). And, in fact, it seems that it is precisely the aforementioned intricacies in making sense of the full range of the biological, physiological and social aspects of our embodied existence that has not allowed sociology to become truly embodied (Newton, 2003: 36) ¹⁰. This is why the body has often remained 'hidden' in sociological texts (Howson and Inglis, 2001: 299).

There are a number of scholars, though, who question the assumption that physiological (or biological) aspects of our embodiment do not actually appear in the writings of Foucault. In other words, they question the assumption that Foucault has talked about bodies only or primarily as social products and has not allowed us to realise the materiality of our flesh – in other words, what our bodies do or can do as objects, as entities. These writers argue that, although Foucault seems to adopt and present a social constructionist approach that views the body as social material by arguing that it is always subject to power relations, social relations (Eighberg, 1998: 41, 118; Johnston, 1996: 329), he also shows that the body lives its own life-course. They continue that Foucault illustrates when discussing sexuality in particular, that our bodies have always lived and experienced life in their own ways, regardless of how power might have invested them. In talking, they say – not extensively but talking nonetheless – about the bodies of the hysterical woman, the pervert, the Malthusian couple and the children in THS and about how and why they came to be placed under control, he reveals that their bodies, as do ours, existed and lived beyond regulation, as well. And this is precisely why they needed to be studied. Foucault thus shows, they conclude, that our bodies are both social (created by power) and material (non-social, although not simply biological givens either). And

¹⁰ And, of course, there is also the fact that I mentioned earlier, that our philosophical tradition focuses

he helps us understand that our flesh “is not only an objective signifier in the social world but an active, embodied ... being” (Monaghan, 1999: 286).

Possibly, then, they say, Foucault’s reluctance to propose a specific way of talking about the body is not an indication of a limitation in his work but means that he has left open for us myriad options as to how to make a truly embodied sociology by studying the body in various contexts and situations.

Indeed, it seems that for Foucault there cannot be a specific way of talking about the body, given that the ways our bodies live but also experience power are as variant and diverse as power itself. And this opportunity that Foucault has given us, to think in many different ways about the body is – according to these sociologists – one of the great values of his work.

To put it otherwise, Foucault’s supporters claim that he has “describe[d] the mechanism by which bodies are constituted as cultural constructions” in a way that presupposes that:

there is in fact a body which is external to its construction, invariant in some of the structures, and which in fact represents a dynamic locus of resistance to culture per se (Butler, 1999(b): 308).

The Foucauldian body is a material that may resist the social forces that invest and regulate it. The body, as seen by Foucault, is a substance that feels and lives pleasures, at the same time that it is subjected to social disciplining (Butler, 1999(a): 14; Butler, 1999(b): 309-12).

The various sexual habits of individuals were studied, categorised and regulated by scientists and state institutions, but these habits and sexuality itself were lived, felt and enjoyed by people and their bodies before they came to be put under scrutiny for the reasons explained before (i.e. the need to control the population and to maximise people’s forces so that the capitalist state could further develop, see section 1.1.2.). The body was already ‘living’ sexuality independently of the forces that would come to regulate its conduct at particular moments in history.

This latter aspect – that, at the antipode of the practices that control the body, Foucault introduces the body itself as a potential site of resistance – is often criticised

more on the matters and achievements of the mind; sees us as ‘minds’ rather than bodies.

as a point of contradiction in his work, as I will demonstrate more fully in Chapter 2. Some even argue that the emphasis put by Foucault on the materiality of the body in reality impedes a clear understanding of the functioning of power – that is, of social relations – and of how power relations construct us as subjects¹¹. In other words, by saying that the body resists culture – critics again remark – Foucault denies that culture can write the body.

But once more Foucault's followers point exactly to the benefits of this mode of theorising; namely, to the fact that he is not excluding the possibility of viewing the body as a separate entity, juxtaposing its ontology with culture (Lingis, 1999: 304).

'[T]he body is reconfigured as both the matrix and matter of culture', as subject and object in the production and experience of meaning (Bronfen, 2000: 116).

In other words, the body is lived as produced by social forces and culture affects the ways we experience our bodies but our bodies also shape and constraint the developments of culture.

Scholars like Butler (1999), Lingis (1999: 286-7, 296), Gordon et al (2000: 87) and Bronfen (2000) insist that it is Foucault who has emphasised the necessity of casting light on bod(il)y matters in this way – namely, that he has made us think and talk about bodies as entities connected with and, at the same time, 'separate' from social order that experience life in their own ways. It is Foucault who has reminded sociologists that it is the body that partakes in life, lives disciplines and feels pleasures. They say, it is Foucault who has opened the way to the inclusion of a wide range of experiences of the body in contemporary sociological study and has contributed further to the production of a new field of knowledge about the flesh (relevant discussion also in Mansfield and McGinn, 1993: 51; McKie and Watson, 2000: xv). It is Foucault who has shown us that the "body is a good place to explore how different subjectivities are constructed" (Davis, 1995: 47; similar arguments in Budgeon, 2003: 32). It is he who has drawn our attention not simply to what bodies mean but even more to what they (can) do, particularly with his later writings about the productive aspects of power and resistance (Budgeon, 2003: 52; for a series of

¹¹ Relevant discussion in Butler, 1999(a): 14-5, 17, 20 and further references there.

related practical examples, see Gordon et al, 2000: 87). It is he who has told us it is our bodies that can resist power, at the same time that it is our bodies upon which power is inscribed; that our bodies somehow always counter or ‘ignore’ the forces which ‘create’ them. It is he who emphasised that we *are* our bodies.

In this sense, these scholars conclude, it is probably not unfair to say that Foucault has laid the foundation for a modern ‘theory’ of the human body (be it the body of individuals or of whole populations) – one that emphasises the importance of looking at its very materiality (Turner, 1996: 161; Welton, 1999: 6). And, they suggest, it is undoubtedly useful to take as much from his strategies and analyses, as well as from all those others who have dealt with similar issues in any study of the body.

Much as the views of the ‘pro’-Foucauldian scholars should not be ignored, one cannot but also be tempted to agree with what his critics have argued, that the body is not so obviously present in the work of Foucault. Highlighting the importance of the body is something that Foucault has arguably done in a very abstract manner. His multi-layered, lengthy and historically rich analyses of the birth of modern institutions and subjects seem to leave a ‘gap’ and create the sense of a void in the understanding of the materiality of our bodies. How large this gap actually is and how it may be filled, I explore through this study.

1.1.5. My Interest in the Field

My interest in Foucault and his work developed during the year of my Master’s degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice. What attracted my attention to the French philosopher’s writings was his discussion of the social (that is, the non-strictly legal or penal) methods of disciplining bodies and his debate about the productive aspects of the operation of these disciplines – the generation of *knowledges* about the social world and about ourselves and our bodies through the study of the ways the disciplines write our flesh. I was further intrigued by the fact that it was discussed among sociologists that Foucault’s accounts did not have a deeply and truly embodied character (at the time, for me, the sociology of the body was a completely unknown field of knowledge and Foucault’s writings were – I felt

– as close to it as one could ever get). So, I decided that I should try to explore these matters in more depth. I decided to pursue a study that would be about Foucault and the body. And I felt I should choose for the purpose a place to do it specifically designed for the treatment of our bodies, a place where one could see bodies in full action: the gym.

1.1.6. Appropriations of Foucault and the Impact of Feminism: A Brief Outline

As my previous discussion already demonstrates, a number of interpretations of Foucault's work on power and the body have been attempted. These interpretations come in fact from a variety of writers working in different areas of knowledge and express a variety of perspectives on the nature and value of the French philosopher's texts. One of these fields, as I have shown, is that of sociology of the body itself. Other areas are those of criminology, health studies and gender studies, wherein debates of Foucauldian themes came only as natural consequences of the fact that Foucault discusses the 'births' of a number of social institutions, like the prison or the hospital, but also talks about sexuality and the body.

I will refer to a series of relevant accounts in the subsequent chapters but I will first single out one important reason why it is that many authors from the field of gender studies, and particularly from feminist studies, have demonstrated a great interest in Foucault's writings. This interest emanates from and is associated with the belief that the French philosopher has actually overlooked women's matters, that he has overlooked their experiences of social disciplining and the rules regarding their bodily construct and conduct. As Grosz tells us:

[i]n lieu of any specification, one must presume, along with the rest of patriarchal culture, that the neutral body can only be unambiguously filled in by the male body and men's pleasures (1994: 155-6).

Many feminist scholars accuse Foucault of referring to the body as neutral and, consequently, of talking only about the male body. These authors' texts are especially valuable to this thesis, as many of them make references to a variety of practical everyday examples that reveal women's multiple embodied experiences and

illustrate how power writes women's bodies. While they are in no way without scientificity, these writers' texts do not generally use the highly abstract language of Foucault and are thus easier to follow. They explain Foucault's arguments in a more simplified, but not at all simplistic, manner.

However, these accounts are themselves partial in so much as they ignore how men (and their bodies) are also subjected to power and fail to address men's similar experiences of discipline and control upon their bodies. Bearing in mind that power, according to Foucault, is not something that can be possessed but is a set of practices that regulate social life and are re-produced by the regulation of social affairs (section 1.1.3.), we may argue that men must be affected by power as much as women. It would be wrong to suppose that power is something that can only be wielded by men against women. Fortunately, the attention of many sociologists seems to have shifted towards the embodied experiences of the male population lately. Insights into these experiences fill the gap that much feminist literature has left and have pointed several possible ways in which Foucault's writings on the body may be further interpreted along gender lines.

As far as this study is concerned, references to a large variety of these 'gendered' approaches to Foucault will be made to the degree that they will help illuminate his writings and further the topic of exercise in the gym.

1.1.7. The Influence of Post-Modernity on the Study of Body Matters

The shift in focus from more abstract sociological matters towards the material, embodied experiences of both men and women may also be attributed to the impact of what we have come to name 'post-modernity' on our lives. In the post-modern era, an era that seems to advocate that 'anything goes', we are experiencing a deconstruction of traditional perceptions and divisions – such as body/mind or man/woman – and we often find ourselves doubting our identities and even existence in the world.

Yet, under the influence of postmodernity, we are having precisely the opportunity to investigate a number of perceptions, ideas, practices and attitudes to life, identities and subjectivities (like the 'new man', the 'new woman', the 'modern

citizen' and so on) but also explore in more depth our embodied lives as such. With the mind/body dualism (a dualism that always ended up favouring the discussion of the achievements of the mind and somehow assumed the triviality of the matters of the flesh – see section 1.1.2.) largely deconstructed, the debate of our corporeality has found fertile soil to develop¹².

Although some still find that even in the context of postmodernity much discussion is deemed to focus on more abstract matters of the body rather than on specific lived experiences of the flesh (see Davis, 1997: 15), others argue that it is precisely under this impact that in sociology a turn towards the corporeal has been achieved. It is under the influence of postmodernity that a wide range of experiences of and views about the body and about what it means, what it signifies and what it does have come to light.

1.2. The Project

I will now introduce my project and demonstrate how it relates to Foucault's work and all the different views and stances expressed so far in this Chapter. As I have already mentioned, in this study, I investigate the experiences of a number of people who exercise regularly in the gym. I try to identify the variety of social imperatives that influence these individuals, invest their bodies and drive them to the exercise venue. In this way, I explore Foucault's use and interpretation of the concept of power and further examine his ideas of discipline, pleasure and resistance in relation to exercise. I additionally try to illuminate aspects of his accounts, mainly those associated with the more positive features of power relations (like knowledge, productivity, liberation), that have so far not been given much attention by sociological commentators.

I also examine and discuss the views and writings of a number of other authors who have based their own work on that of Foucault or who have studied gym culture. But mainly, I use my own findings from participant observation at two exercise centres and the narratives of gym users. I also speak with members of the managerial staff of these institutions and with a number of instructors and investigate the aims

¹² See, also, Chapter 3.

and functional objectives of these facilities, as seen from the point of view of those who run them. I try to identify power as ‘expressed’ or operated by the institutions themselves. I explore, namely, the reasons that *legitimate* the gym’s existence. In this way, I try to see how close to everyday reality as perceived by social actors themselves Foucault’s account of power and the use of the body by power’s mechanisms is in this particular social setting, and show further how Foucault’s writings can help us to better understand what happens in the gym.

I also ask gym users to talk to me about their bodies, how they feel about their bodies, how their bodies feel during exercise. I ask them to tell me what they expect their bodies to be able to do. By drawing on their embodied experiences, I also try to make up for this sense of absence from Foucault’s work, and from the sociology of the body, of a ‘proper’ analysis of the body as a lived and living material. I show how people perceive our materiality, our corporeality. I show how the sociology of the body may become truly embodied as I demonstrate how people live their bodies (feel, experience the physiological changes of their bodies and come to know their bodies), as well as live them as parts of the social order. I demonstrate how people’s bodies themselves live the world, how they experience discipline and pleasure, how they feel power through exercise.

1.3. The Structure of the Study

In Chapter 2, I present Foucault’s main ideas (discipline and power, pleasure, resistance, the ethical construction of the self and the body as work of art) as these appear in the writings already briefly discussed here, DP and THS. I present the criticisms often levelled against Foucault and his work and discuss the fairness and the usefulness of these criticisms for our understanding of his writings. I also refer to the usefulness of his accounts for the study of the gym.

In Chapter 3, I continue with a variety of feminist studies that have come to support, on occasions, but mainly to contest Foucault’s writings through their references to women’s specific experiences of embodiment. I continue with the latest insights into the lives of men from the field of men’s studies and discuss the contribution of these analyses to the field of sociology of the body generally, and

particularly to our better understanding of Foucault. Although gender is not the main focus of this study, the importance of this chapter for this thesis is paramount as the relevant literature helps us precisely to make better sense of Foucault's work on power and how it shapes the body, helps us see how the body is caught up in the social order and further prepares the ground for our understanding of the gym culture.

In Chapter 4, I include a description of the empirical project and demonstrate how I organised my research, in order to be able to test and better understand and interpret Foucault's theoretical stance. I talk about the specific tools that I have used for the collection and analysis of the empirical material. I also refer to the difficulties and limitations to which my research has fallen prey.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I continue with an analysis of my findings and demonstrate how they relate to, cast light on or contest, prove or disprove Foucault's accounts. In Chapter 5, I demonstrate what the forces are that drive people to the gym and what bodies our society needs. In Chapter 6, I show how participants in my study experience discipline and pleasure, how they negotiate and resist power but also how they understand their bodies as lived and living materials. I illustrate how, and to what extent, these people's perceptions and actions match or transgress Foucault's and other related writings.

I conclude in Chapter 7 with a discussion of what my study has shown about Foucault and his work and more specifically, about power (that it is multifaceted and productive) and the body (that it is lived but also lives the world in its own way), about society (a highly demanding one but also a society that allows us to celebrate the many opportunities that it opens up for us as it constantly progresses), about Foucault's actual contribution to the sociology of the body (although abstract, his work accommodates an understanding of how the body experiences the world independently of the imperatives of culture). I also refer to the contribution of this particular project to the latter field of knowledge and make suggestions for further developments in it.

2. The Work of M. Foucault on Power, the Body and the Self

[He] is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so.

So said Foucault about Nietzsche in an interview with J.J. Brochier in June 1975 (PK: 53). I have chosen to replace Nietzsche's name with the more general 'he', as I believe that the same words that Foucault used for Nietzsche could equally well be reserved for himself. Given Foucault's affiliation to Nietzschean thought and his utilisation of the Nietzschean writings, it seems fair to argue that Foucault, too, has been a philosopher of power who cannot be confined within a certain political theory (PK: 54; Turner, 1996: 159-60; Danaher et al., 2000: 9). His own work, much like that of Nietzsche, can and indeed has been used by a variety of writers for a number of purposes and to support a wide range of arguments and causes – even antithetical ones (also, Marks, 2000: 129; O'Donnell, 2003: 757).

As I mentioned in section 1.1.2., it is mainly in his *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* that Foucault develops his ideas on power.

In this chapter, I will attempt to represent the most important points of his account as they appear in these books. To do this, I shall follow the chronological order in which these texts were produced and published. This will enable me to show how Foucault's analysis of the notion of power gradually develops, and will allow me to offer a better justification of why I think the author's writings ought to be treated as complementary, continuous or as a 'fluid' whole, to borrow Simons' phrase (1995: 8)¹³.

By arguing in favour of this complementarity I do not mean to imply that Foucault wished necessarily to create a rigid theory about power or that he wished to provide in THS, which appears later chronologically, a definite and concrete conclusion for all he had argued earlier in DP and other writings. One can easily find out that he, in fact, did not want absolute theoretical rigidity to be the outcome of his endeavour (PK: 192-3). On the contrary it seems that Foucault wished his thoughts and accounts to be flexible, to reflect and encapsulate the possibility of change and

¹³ Similar argument on the complementarity of Foucault's writings expressed in Dumm, 2002: 78; contra, Szokolczai, 1998: 1403.

the fluidity of social life, and to be able to stimulate a variety of discussions on power and its nature. It was not up to him, he argued often, to lay down how his books should be used. His texts, he further claimed, “[should]/do not have the function of proof” (PK: 192).

When I talk about complementarity and continuity, I thus refer primarily to the easily identifiable similarities that Foucault’s earlier and later works present us with. I have in mind his references to and emphases on facts and notions such as the gaze of experts, discipline and the positive value of power but also to his consistent use of ‘genealogy’ as a method for the analysis of power in the two texts under study¹⁴.

Looking at these projects in the sequence in which they were written, however, will also help me to trace and discuss some of the inconsistencies that, according to some, appear in Foucault’s work. It will enable me to identify certain claims that may (be seen to) contradict what the author has argued earlier in his books and to spot details that may show that the form of analysis he makes might not always correspond with social reality.

I believe it is essential to present and clarify these issues here, so that in the following chapters I will be able to explain the connection between my research questions and the theoretical framework much more easily. In addition, this treatment will enable me to demonstrate what the empirical findings of my study show in relation to or against a more refined, much clearer, less elusive account than the one Foucault’s seems to be on first encounter.

2.1. Discipline and Punish

2.1.1. The Dispersal of Power: The Example of the Power to Punish

In DP, Foucault uses the example of the power to punish to talk about the omnipresence of power and its dispersal across the whole of society. The author guides us through the various penal regimes and apparatuses of Western Europe. He

¹⁴ Relevant discussion also in Sarup, 1993: 58, 73; Sheridan, 1980: 165, 205, 225; Robinson, 2003: 136.

looks back over history, making what he calls a genealogical account, in order to identify and study the moments, the conditions and 'force relations' that have enabled, surrounded the emergence of and permeated various modern day social institutions, such as the prison¹⁵.

In this version, often contested by historians¹⁶, Foucault places the moment of the appearance of the penitentiary in the 18th century. In the opening of his book one finds a description of the execution of Damiens, the regicide, that took place in Paris in 1757; a vivid account and at times too elaborate for the reader to bear (DP: 3-6). A few pages further (DP: 6-7), in juxtaposition, one is presented with the seemingly much more civilised and humane timetable of activities and duties that, not many years later, the young prisoners in Mettray, a penal colony, have to follow as part of their punishment (DP: 16, 57).

The first is a wrathful and revengeful act of the monarch reserved for the violation of his body *as a symbol of authority* (that represents the state, grants rights and rules) against the flesh of the criminal person. The second (incarceration) is a penal practice less indicative of such symbolism (DP: 47; also, Sarup, 1993: 67; Turner, 1996: 175). The first (the public torture) is a spectacular (precisely, in the sense that it takes place before the eyes of the people) and painful political savagery. The second is a more 'hidden' (literally, behind walls) and 'curative' in character act, aiming at the prisoner's rehabilitation (DP: 10). It is a mode of punishment that touches the deviant's body in a usually less brutal, less immediate way, but facilitates the reach and treatment of his soul. It is a penal style that has less to do with the criminal act itself and a lot more with the correction of the drives, desires, inclinations and tendencies of the person subjected to it; the latter's mind and identity (DP: 9, 11, 16-18)¹⁷. Foucault argues, admittedly somewhat surprisingly for someone who has placed so much emphasis on the necessity to study the body (see section 1.1.2.), that in this era:

¹⁵ On Foucault's consistent use of genealogy as a method, see Danaher et al., 2000: 9; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 106, 109; Sarup, 1993: 58-9; Butler, 1999(a): 15.

¹⁶ Relevant discussion in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 120; also, Driver, 1994: 114.

¹⁷ As the scope of punishment changes towards the soul, as it now aims at the correction of one's character rather than one's elimination from the social field as a pay-back for a criminal's offence against the authority of the King, one also observes a remarkable change in terminology. S/he, who was formerly the 'criminal', becomes now rather simply a 'deviant' (DP: 9-10; analytical discussion in Garland, 1990: 136, 145, 148).

[t]he point of application of this power [to punish] is no longer the body ...; it is the mind (DP: 101).

The new¹⁸ penal system, he tells us, focuses on the *normalisation* of individuals, namely, on making them comply with the standards, norms and regulations set by the rest of society (a newly democratised society in those days), through the use of a variety of techniques, to which I shall refer shortly (DP: 183; also, Sheridan, 1980: 137, 140-1; Cousins and Hussein, 1984: 184).

The decline of the spectacle, the author informs us, occurs parallel to those social transformations that I have previously spoken of (section 1.1.2.): the decline of monarchy; the rise of the middle-classes; industrial and scientific development and the appearance of a variety of institutions which replace the King in the administration of the affairs of the state and serve the needs of a growing population.

The way of living changes. In the new order that is created, what is desired and what constitutes the ultimate goal is the achievement of social harmony, the utilisation of people's forces, and the speedy and efficient production of goods that will cover the needs of the people (DP: 25, 152; also, Sheridan, 1980: 144; Marks, 2000: 134; Pratt, 1986; Dumm, 2002: 100).

However, the changes in the social scene of the time did not happen smoothly, neither were they wholly unproblematic. In the new conditions, there appeared a number of issues and predicaments that had to be dealt with and solved. Crime, criminality and consequently punishment, Foucault tells us, were fields where one could see the reflections of the broader changes that occurred at that period. In the post-feudal era, the old aristocracies lost their privileges. The bourgeoisie expanded, large numbers of people gathered in the cities in hope of a better future

¹⁸ By 'new' I do not mean here that imprisonment was historically one of the latest techniques of punishment to have emerged but rather refer to the order in which it appears in DP. At times and to some analysts, it seems as if Foucault has chosen to present the two practices (torture and incarceration) as following one another chronologically. This is something that has in effect often put under question his credibility as a historian (see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 120; Driver, 1994: 114, 127). But Foucault does at no point in his work claim that something like this has actually been the case. On the contrary, he reminds us of the co-existence of a variety of modes of punishment and denies that the public torture – the spectacle of corporal punishment – necessarily predated the others or that it was even the most common sanction amongst them (DP: 32-3). What he in fact describes are the forces that led slowly to the abandonment of this cruel punitive act in favour of other means for responding to a variety of crimes (Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 168).

and many of them began to offer their labour to the numerous emerging and expanding industries. A number of problems arose as consequences of these phenomena.

In this era when production and development were massive and vital for the survival of the population, Foucault advises us to observe a “shift from the criminality of blood to a criminality of fraud”. The possession of a wide range of commodities became possible for many more people (if not for all) as riches left the hands of the few (DP: 77). The ‘new’ crimes were associated with and aimed mostly at deceitfully depriving fellow citizens of their money and possessions. However, as monarchies eclipsed, these crimes lacked the ‘political’ character of the offences of the past against the only authorities of the old feudal states, against the political bodies of the kings as guarantors of the lives of their subjects, as the alleged protectors of the meek. The ‘new’ criminals became the enemies not of the monarchs but of the bourgeois and working wholes (DP: 81). Thus, punishment in its old form of paradigmatic execution of offenders in front of the public and in the name of the King for the protection of monarchical authority no longer served any purpose. It could not and did not represent the interests of the newer authorities. Neither did it meet the needs, priorities, expectations and aims of the rising classes and citizens who were directly affected by crime and wanted to be protected from it. What the new reality asked for were different rules for the regulation of life in general and the new categories of crimes and objects of crime required and demanded different modes of sanctioning (DP: 77, 80, 269; also, Sheridan, 1980: 144; Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 180; Pratt, 1986). Thus, as Lingis puts it briefly:

[t]he development of production, the amassing of wealth, the rapid increase in property holdings – which characterized the epoch – motivated the will to extend penalization into zones where, previously, the identification of offence as offence against the body of the sovereign had left certain activities unlegislated or had tolerated certain illegalities (1999: 288).

But at this same time when it came to be in the interest of all that all the people’s forces are utilised (see, also, section 1.1.2.), it also came as no surprise that criminals were to be corrected rather than being ‘disposed’. They came to be advised

and trained in order to learn how to be able to behave in accordance with the rules that governed the lives of everybody else as well. Through a variety of techniques they came to be shown how they may contribute to the well-being of all as soon as their punishment was over. At that point, they would need to be 'thrown back' to the field of production and help society to progress, instead of being eliminated for the wrongs and injustices they had committed.

It is for all the aforementioned reasons that the focus of the penal reforms came to be on these people's wills, that the focus of the new modes of punishment became the deviants' inclinations, tendencies, attitudes, perversions; in a few words, their souls and minds.

It is the souls and minds that become the target of punishment and regulation because the purpose is the elimination of individuals' harmful habits. It is the souls and minds that become the target of punishment rather than the flesh, for the flesh is necessary and useful for the new political economy. It is the flesh that can offer its labour, the flesh that can help society advance further.

All these social transformations, then, lead us to the penitentiary of the type of Mettray with its timetables and the regulation of detainees' activities. This is a place of exclusion and segmentation of the violators of the laws – laws that reflect and protect the new order; they protect the population.

At the same time however, as Foucault tells us, the existence of these laws reflects how dispersed the right to punish has become in the newly established bourgeois democracies. Under the new circumstances large numbers of the population affected by crime have the right to demand the deviants' punishment and pursue it in court. Powers previously held by the monarchs, like the power to punish, now spread to the growing bourgeoisie. Litigation and the administration of these cases by the courts help sustain the latest political regime effectively, as they confirm the non-deviant population's rights and status (Lingis, 1999: 289, 291). In this sense, power in the new order becomes a privilege of all.

Let me now take a look at the structure and function of the ideal modern penitentiary. This will enable me to demonstrate in due course in what ways and on the basis of which rules, techniques, and principles, power functions – to illustrate, following Foucault, the meaning of (modern) power.

2.1.2. *The Modern Penitentiary: Panopticism and the Other Technologies of Power*

The dispersed power to punish, as described above, is sustained further, Foucault argues, as each offender learns to exercise it upon him/herself. To illustrate how this is done, namely how each deviant controls and disciplines him or herself, Foucault turns his focus to the modern penitentiary. For Foucault, the penitentiary finds its epitome in the *Panopticon* (DP: 198, 200, Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 189). The Panopticon is an imaginary prison, first described by Jeremy Bentham (1791). Its construction, as its name suggests, allows for the observation of every activity which takes place in any of the cells, which are built around a central watchtower. Given that the model provides for the enclosure of only one person in every cell and that all compartments face the tower (and also allow a view of each other), it is not hard to realise that the inspection of any behaviour becomes rather easy. The marking of differences between the detained individuals, the knowledge of the degree of abstention from the rules of the system by each individual, the knowledge of them as personalities and as beings, the knowledge of what they do or of what they are capable of doing (i.e., if they obey the law or if they violate it and to what extent, how they carry out their routines) are all facilitated by this construction that exposes one to the visibility of all others (DP: 200, 203, 251; also, Sheridan, 1980: 154). The Panopticon does the “work of a naturalist”, Foucault tells us:

It makes it possible to draw up differences: ... it makes it possible to observe performances ..., to map attitudes, to assess characters, to draw up rigorous classifications (DP: 203).

Foucault shows further how the Panopticon and analogously the modern penitentiary function on the basis of certain principles and techniques; the *disciplines* as he calls them (DP: 137). The punishment, coercion and control of deviants, the cure of their souls, their correction, all these things that the new penal system aims at, become possible in a number of ways, which work cumulatively (DP: 162, Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 172). The overall process through which these purposes are met, the practices that are used as well as the effects of these techniques that help correct and cure and train people, constitute what Foucault calls in a word the

‘discipline’. Discipline is realised firstly through the organisation of the bodies of the inmates in space (DP: 143). In prison, one’s flesh finds itself in a place “heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself” (DP: 141). One body is supposed to be allocated to one cell. Secondly, treatment is facilitated by the regulation of people’s time, the establishment of certain rhythms and the repetitions of different activities for completing certain tasks (DP: 149). Thirdly, the treatment of the body itself, through instruction to specific gestures and moves, also helps the process. People learn how to perform certain skills (DP: 156, 162).

What is most important for us to note further is that people, in the penal colony, become the objects of observation, comparison and judgement (DP: 170, 177, 184). This is judgment regarding the measure, level and degree of their correction and ultimately their capacity to reunite with and be integrated into society.

Foucault argues that the ultimate implication of the existence of the modern penitentiary is the operation of one practice that has been upgraded to a superlative technology of power in the modern era. This is the technology of the gaze or, to put it another way, panopticism or surveillance. He has shown us that the Panopticon is a place of total visibility and illustrates the broader effects and advantages of this visibility for the disciplining of offenders who – because they are said to be constantly watched by the authorities who occupy the central tower – try to comply with the rules of the prison and carry out the tasks imposed upon them on their own (DP: 187). In this way, the detainees enact punishment upon themselves.

Foucault adds and demonstrates that detainees in the Panopticon do not actually know when their behaviour is being watched, as the interior of the middle tower is built in such a way as to prevent one looking in on it. The managers of the regime, the people who have the right to control the implementation of rules are no longer discernible figures under the new regime. They are nothing like the executioners of the past. They are merely suspected to be watching everything from behind the windows of the construction in the centre, although it is never certain that they are actually present (DP: 200-201). Yet despite this, prisoners do what they have to do.

Foucault uses this example in order to show that power operates on the basis of surveillance for all of us in contemporary societies and that, just like detainees,

fearful of falling subject to any authorities' gaze, we all come to abide by the rules that we are expected to comply with on our own (also, Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 172). He implies that in our everyday lives we are all exposed to the visibility of others. We are being looked at but also look at others around us, compare ourselves to them, try to adjust our behaviour to what we perceive as being the norm that everybody else follows. In reality, we are unable to avoid the effect of the gaze. The power of the gaze is to make sure that the system works efficiently (DP: 201-204; also, Sheridan, 1980: 184; Danaher et al, 2000: 76). As he shows us:

By ... means [such as surveillance] power, even when faced with ruling a multiplicity of men, c[an] be as efficacious as if it were exercised over a single one (PK: 152).

As power is becoming dispersed, the principle of visibility (looking at others and at how they perform their duties and obligations towards society but also looking at oneself in order to make sure that one is not violating any social norms) also penetrates and exercises its effects on the whole social field. The deployment of this technique (visibility) is itself an effect – albeit not an intended one – of the broader social changes already described. It proves useful for the operation of a number of institutions that enhance their role and duties in this era and which are called to measure and control people's conditions of existence, their constitution and performances for the benefit of the group. Such institutions may be the school or the hospital, the army or the church.

Now that the aim of society has become the utilisation of people's forces in every field of action, and now that efficiency in production and progress have become the priorities of the system, the principle of visibility and the specific technique of surveillance prove useful indeed for the marking of behaviours and of all attitudes and performances that occur within the industry and the administration of the state. Panopticism as well as the other techniques of the prison break out of it and penetrate the whole social world, to guarantee efficiency in the functioning of society. It is in this sense that various social institutions eventually come to replicate the prison. It is in this sense, too, that:

Bentham's panopticon scheme becomes the principal model for the detailed organisation of political scrutiny over the bodies of both deviants and citizens (Turner: 1996: 162).

The 'policing of the selves' is no longer a feature of the penitentiary only or an effect of power relations that develop within the prison. It becomes a characteristic of society overall (also, Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 113; Sheridan, 1980: 136; Jay, 2003: 17). The expansion of the practices of the prison outside its limits is what Foucault names the "carceral network" or "continuum" (DP: 305).

However, one should remember that, although admittedly a place for the isolation and exclusion of the dangerous and deviant, the penitentiary is also an organisation that reflects, promotes, upholds and secures society's beliefs and values about what is normal or not, harmful or not, good or not. The prison is in no way outside society. It adopts and reflects on a smaller scale societies' ways of functioning and gives back to these societies. It borrows from it and offers back to it individuals who are controlled, corrected and trained to efficiency (DP: 80, 209). It creates knowledges about the subjects it encloses and about the creation of subjects overall (also, Armstrong, 1994: 22-3). The prison uses the techniques available in the broader social world as a means to control. One should not be surprised then that the panoptical effect (surveillance), much like the other techniques of operation of the prison, expands and reflects our social world. One should not wonder about the fact that actually:

prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals which all resemble prisons (DP: 228).

It should be worth further acknowledging this: the technology of surveillance through the exposure of prisoners to total visibility has one major advantage over all other previously presented disciplinary techniques; rather than operating only post-actively, reactively or correctively it also works preventively or in advance and, also, outside the limits of an enclosed space such as the prison (DP: 206; also, Lingis, 1999: 291). It facilitates the marking of differences and the spotting of deviations from social norms at very early stages and thus protects but also exposes all individuals to the control of others much more effectively (relevant discussion in DP: 76, 80, 86, 101, 206; also in Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 174; Jenks, 2003: 37).

2.1.3. *Internalising Discipline, Self-Regulating Behaviour*

In talking about self-surveillance, Foucault also introduces the idea of *internalisation* of social norms. He shows us how inmates understand and follow the rules of society, which they were clearly informed or reminded of by the courts at the moment of adjudication and which they constantly recall in prison under the threat of additional penalties to be imposed in case they violate (or are seen to violate) again. While in prison, inmates are made to make the law part of their existence, to abide by it. It is only this suspicion that they can or may be watched at all times that leads them to monitor themselves constantly by themselves, almost *automatically*, without further specific instruction from the authorities (also, Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 151; Marks, 2000: 134; Sheridan, 1980: 139). He concludes that inmates “are caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (DP: 201).

What exactly this power situation is, what it consists of, how it becomes manifest, I will examine shortly. But it may be worth repeating here that in modern societies power relations are so constructed as to make all citizens “actively participate in self-regulating behaviour” (Sturken and Catwright, 2001: 96).

Let me sum up briefly at this point: the new punitive system that Foucault describes focuses on the understanding of the wrongdoing by the person who has committed the illegal act. It aims at the restitution of normalcy through submission of the deviant to a style of living which allows no possibility of further abstention from the rules with his/her immersion in a field of total visibility (PK: 153) and his/her subjection to the threat of imposition and the implementation of various other “(micro)penalties” upon him/her (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 158). This is a style of living that facilitates the internalisation of desired behaviour; the understanding and learning to do on one’s own what one is told constitutes the norm. It is a style of living that makes possible not only one’s adaptation to any existing social norms but ultimately the normalisation, correction and standardisation (of behaviour) of all citizens to the aim of society’s stability, efficiency and progress. The minds of individuals are taken advantage of in such a way by the new structure that – even

when completely alone – they cannot abstain from that which has been set as standard or proper by society.

2.1.4. Defining Power

As I mentioned in section 2.1.1., Foucault describes the way of operation of the penitentiary, in order to explain how power has become diffuse, how it has left the hands of its previous holders (the monarchs and their representatives), has permeated the whole of society and its institutions and has come to be exercised by each person, upon him- or herself (DP: 206; also, Armstrong, 1994: 20). Of course, the Panopticon may never have existed in reality, but a variety of penal organisations (like the Mettray that Foucault describes at the beginning of his book) implemented techniques, practices and measures that were very similar to the techniques that one imagines the Panopticon's function would be based upon (Driver, 1994: 125). Foucault wants to show us how all these practices, particularly the 'principle of visibility', became broadly institutionalised and produced conforming behaviours (PK: 148). In the operation of the penitentiary with its rigid rules one can identify the existence and importance of timetables, study the activities taking place and feel the surveillance of movements, gestures and attitudes (DP: 293). One can identify power, one can understand what power is, what it comprises, and how it becomes manifest. Foucault tells us:

Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relations in which individuals are caught up (DP: 202).

Punitive practices and the disciplining of people are, for the French philosopher, only types of power (DP: 147, 215; also, Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 143). Their study enables us to realise precisely the functioning of power. In this era that Foucault describes:

a form of power [came] into being that beg[an] to exercise itself through social production and social service. It bec[ame] a matter of obtaining productive service from individuals in

their concrete lives. ... [I]n consequence, a real and effective 'incorporation' of power was necessary, in the sense that power had to be able to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behaviour. Hence the significance of methods like ... discipline (PK: 125).

These techniques did not only have, then, a negative value. They had a positive one as well, as they produced knowledges and provided people (primarily but not exclusively the inmates of the penitentiary) with the necessary skills to operate effectively in the new social and economic conditions of the 18th century (Danaher et al, 2000: 51). But what the shifts in the modes of punishment signified, according to Foucault, were precisely the changes in the way power was exercised, changes in power relations (PK: 26, 39, 202, 251; Sheridan, 1980: 139; Driver, 1994: 122). And what "[t]he eighteenth century invented [was] a synaptic regime of power, a regime of its exercise within the social body rather than from above it" (PK: 39). Power turned every single individual "into its creature" (Magill, 1997: 60). The prison offered its principles of function to a number of other social institutions. As Foucault argues:

[W]hat was an islet, ..., a circumstantial measure or a singular model, became a general formula (DP: 209).

As the rule of monarchy faded, as populations grew, as new classes rose, as new industries were born, as science advanced, as skills had to be learnt and acquired, as efficiency in production was demanded, as harmony in social relations was sought, it became necessary that people were known as beings and personalities, reformed, made able to fit in the new conditions and controlled (Driver, 1994: 124). Their behaviour needed to be watched at all times, subjected to study, to comparison, to judgment, to instruction, to correction; in a word, to *discipline*. Their lives had to be spatially and temporally regulated. The ultimate need was to treat people's souls, to control their urges, to enable them to learn things, to teach them how to live in the new conditions, to help them make sense of their abilities, capacities and forces, but also to eliminate the danger of them harming the system of capitalism and bourgeois democracy in their ignorance or in their unruly manners, thus hindering the progress

of all. The necessity was to achieve compliance and conformity with the rules that made the survival of the post-feudal society possible (also, Sheridan, 1980: 139-40, 148; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 143; Howe, 1994: 196, Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 188; Marks, 2000: 128).

What one realises is that what is described in DP is not simply a historical account of the various modes of punishment that Europe has adopted throughout the last couple of centuries. What we read is not the history of control mechanisms and punitive practices as such. Foucault's intention has rather been to provide an analysis of the idea of power through a history "of the present", "the present as 'modernity'" (DP: 31; also, Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 120),

the present as a form of a particular kind of domain of rationality, constituted by its place on a diachronic gradient; a 'regime of truth' composed of a field of problems, questions and responses, determined by the continuity and discontinuity, clarity or obscurity of the administered ensemble of relations which constitute the partition between present and past, 'new' and 'old' (PK: 241-2).

One of these fields of problems, questions and responses was that of criminality and punishment. By presenting these issues to us and by making a genealogy, Foucault's aim was to analyse, uncover and help us understand power and its constituents, its content, its function and its effects (Danaher et al., 2000: xi, 26; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 107-109; also, PK: 51, 117).

According to Foucault, power is an abstract notion, a *disembodied*¹⁹ concept, in the sense that it belongs to nobody and can be identified with no one specifically (Gordon, 1980: 234-5). It is presented as a "cluster of relations" (PK: 198) or a "relation of forces" (PK: 200). It is a "process" (Sheridan, 1980: 184), a "complex strategical situation" (Baudrillard, 1987: 7), a "heterogeneous ensemble of practices and techniques" that produce us as subjects (Sheridan, 1980: 139; also, Burkitt, 1998: 495) through our interaction with others, through our exposure to the visibility of others and through the training of ourselves in a variety of social institutions and contexts. But power is also something reproduced by us in our interaction with others

¹⁹ Again, a word that Foucault's commentators use and which seems to take us away from the notion of the materiality of our bodies. In reality, the term is employed to illustrate that power cannot be identified with any specific individual or institution.

(PK: 98). It is recreated by us as we embrace, perform according to, comply with and transmit society's values, standards, norms, imperatives and practices in our communication with other people. Power, Foucault argues, "is omnipresent in the social body because it is coterminous with the conditions of social relations in general" (PK: 246). Because power is omnipresent in the social body and dispersed throughout it, everyone can partake in it. Everyone can exercise power. He clarifies, though, that relations between members of society and relations of power analogously are not necessarily equal. Foucault admits that there exist "difference[s] of potentials" between those who exercise power (PK: 201). But the 'difference of potentials' is not what he associates with who has power. In this sense, Foucault does not see power as the exclusive right of a privileged few (also, Driver, 1994: 117). Power, for him, is the conditions that would enable even the seemingly less privileged individuals, according to other more classical definitions of the concept, to experiment with their lives, to look into them, to reflect on their experiences, to come to know themselves and their potentials, to understand how social relations operate and make sense of their position in the world. Family influences, teachers' influences and influences from the particular communities where people belong, cultural influences are some of these relations and dynamics that Foucault attributes the name 'power'. Over and over again, he emphasises that:

[p]ower is neither given, nor exchanged ... It only exists in action (PK: 89).

Furthermore it exists in social interaction, it is inherently social. It reveals itself at every different kind of social relation, every moment of a day. Therefore, Foucault additionally tells us, power takes many different forms. And it is because of the various forms it takes, because of its heterogeneity, but also because it is exercised in so many different ways, that it may be manifest both as rigid and oppressive and as productive and liberating at the same time (also, Dumm, 2002: 152).

The exercise of power further "establishes [the] relationships between [the various] heterogeneous elements [of our social world]" (PK: 245). Power enables people to do things and informs their choices. But power also reflects the fact that the

conditions in which people grow are already as heterogeneous, multifaceted, diverse and even antithetical, as it is itself.

2.1.5. *Power and the Body*

In talking about the changes in the penal regimes earlier (section 2.1.1.), I mentioned that Foucault argues that in the modern era there has been a change in the target of punishment towards the soul. This sounds contradictory to what I have noted in the introduction about Foucault's contribution to the sociology of the body and the emphasis he places on the body, as well as his argument that it is the body that constitutes the ultimate locus upon which power is exercised and through which power-relations become manifest (DP: 25)²⁰. As Dreyfus and Rabinow also remark though:

Foucault ... is seeking to isolate the specific mechanisms of technology through which *power is actually articulated on the body*. [He] is attempting to write the effective history of the appearance, the articulation and the spread of these political technologies of the body (1982: 113). [Emphasis added]

Yet the question remains:

[C]an one write a history against the back-ground of a history of bodies, when such systems of punishment claim to have only the secret souls of criminals as their objective? (DP: 25)

“And how can this be done?”, one could further add. The answer to the first question is affirmative. Foucault assures us that it is all:

still a question of situating the techniques of punishment – whether they seize the body in the ritual of public torture and execution or whether they are addressed to the soul – in the history of ... body politic (DP: 28).

²⁰ Garland (1990: 171) also discusses the problematic interpretations that Foucault's references to power as targeting the soul have led to.

For him, it is the body which is always and ultimately subjected to training, to rules of spatiality, to temporal regulations, to discipline, whether in the prison, the hospital, the school or any other modern social institution (DP: 116, 137-8; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 153-4; Driver, 1994: 115; Sheridan, 1980: 140). For him, soul, body and power are connected in the new era (DP: 128). The difference lies, as I have said, in the fact that the new economy of power demands that the body is used as means of production rather than being destroyed, that it is taken advantage of rather than becoming/being made extinct. In the passage from the monarchical regime to the era of capitalism and to a period when people are no longer subjects of a sole despot, in the transition to the age of the social contract and of technological advancements, the change to the way in which the human body is viewed and treated is to be found. In the time when power spreads to everybody, the social body as a whole and the body of each individual, rather than one body only – that of the King – has to be protected and taken care of, in order for the new regime to be sustained (PK: 55; also section *1.1.2.*).

The essence targeted by the various disciplinary mechanisms may be the soul, the control of one's drives, inclinations and tendencies. But the techniques of discipline of the soul are ultimately reflected upon and capture the body. They become clear by looking at it (at the body in the prison, in the school, in the hospital etc) and at the functions that it performs (learning to write, learning to do things in a proper manner, learning to care for one's health) and the ways it performs them, even when alone. The soul becomes a "technology of power over the body" (DP: 29). In this sense, it also becomes "the prison of the body" (DP: 30). The body is still as an entity, as object – throughout history – the sole locus of manifestation of power. It is constantly involved in power struggles, reveals and 'confesses'²¹ changes in power relations (DP: 25-26, 29).

Foucault argues in favour of the appreciation of our corporeality, when he says that:

²¹ To use a term from the HS, vol. 1: 19.

one must set aside the widely held thesis that power, in our bourgeois, capitalist, societies has denied the reality of the body in favour of the soul, consciousness, ideality. In fact nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power (PK: 57-8).

It is thus the study of the body that allows us to realise the meaning, the aims and the changes in the nature of power. It is the study of the body that facilitates our understanding of how power is exercised each time, towards whom, in what way and for what purpose (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 153). It is an examination of this kind that further enables us to understand our societies and their aims as well as their ways of functioning in general. As Foucault concludes:

One needs to study what kind of body ... current society needs ... (PK: 58).

2.1.6. Power/Knowledge: Power as a Productive Force: A First Indication

In order for people to be able to function in and further support the latest political regime, power called for and facilitated at the same time the subjection of individuals' bodies to study (surveillance), to certain regulations and to training. In these new conditions people had to be made not only docile but also useful (also, Dumm, 2002: 100). Power invested with its techniques their bodies for the purpose of making them so and in the course of its function produced a number of knowledges about individuals' capacities. It was supported by these knowledges and fed back to them constantly. Power and knowledge or rather *power/knowledge* as Foucault calls it (the observation of people and of the conditions of their social world by themselves and by the authorities, in order for their capabilities and their surroundings to become known, measured and taken advantage of) interrelated, not only to suppress, but also, or primarily, to produce (DP: 26; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 112). It produced discussions and knowledge about power itself, about the way it operates, about individuals and about our bodies and created further knowledge that advanced and led to the deployment of other mechanisms that facilitated further the exercise of power generally and over the body in particular. It is because of this that power is said to work in "constant spirals" and is not to be understood as a linear relationship or an act of one being against another (THS, vol. 1: 47, 92). And it is

because of this that power and knowledge are also said to ‘create’ the body. It is through this process that power reveals itself as a *productive force* as it takes hold of the flesh and, at the same time it places it under observation and control, it teaches certain skills: it makes people aware of their ontology (DP: 294). In the school, to give an example, a pupil is controlled by its teachers in its movements, behaviour and in learning. S/he is meant to sit at his/her desk for certain hours during the day, go outside and play for others and speak only when the teacher allows it. S/he learns to write and read, copies letters and syllables from the board over and over again until his/her hands move freely over the notebook and repeats sounds so that s/he learns to pronounce the words properly. All these actions are repeated every day. Seemingly, the one who has the ‘power’ in class is the teacher, who teaches the child manners of conduct, reading and writing. But actually, power is also what the pupil acquires as s/he comes to make sense of the world around and of his/her own abilities. S/he learns to exercise this power over oneself first in the classroom by abiding to the regulations of the teacher but gradually learns how to lead his/her own life independently and make use of the skills s/he has learnt in the school outside it and understand when s/he must use these skills accordingly. S/he is controlled and examined until the day he or she finishes school; but in addition, and because of these processes of regulation, control, repetition of actions and examination, children learn to develop their own behaviour in the school and lead efficiently their own lives²².

2.1.7. The Failures of the Prison Regime: An Ineffective Theory of Power?

In the final pages of DP Foucault discusses situations where one may observe enhanced criminal activity even within the prison or situations where former detainees continue their criminal careers with ever greater success once released from it (DP: 271, 300-301). This discussion, as I will illustrate further, often raises questions as to whether Foucault’s account of power illustrates accurately how power transforms individuals into docile and useful subjects. Is Foucault’s account of the

²² See relevant examples in Connor et al (2004).



operation of power really workable and can power itself be a positive force? These are issues that I will address in the following sections.

2.2. The History of Sexuality

2.2.1. Power as Positive Force: Extending the Discussion

What I have described up to now is what one reads in DP. The deployment of the idea of power as a positive and productive force is elaborated by Foucault mainly in the *History of Sexuality*, particularly in volume 1 (*The Will to Knowledge*). Here the author questions the hypothesis that the 17th century was characterised by a number of prohibitions regarding people's sexuality and their use of the sexual arts. Having described power as a set of techniques rather than an order imposed from above and this time using the practice of confession as an example of a technique of power, Foucault manages to show how the revelation of individuals' sexual habits has facilitated (one could even say produced) an involvement of the authorities in their lives that has effectively enhanced the possibility of life (THS, vol. 1: 18, 26, 30; PK: 215-6; also, Sheridan, 1980: 165, 171; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 202, 206).

Although the term draws on religion and starts off as a religious practice, confession here should not only be understood in strictly theological terms; that is, as an account of one's deviation from some religious rule to a servant of God for the purpose of being pardoned for one's sins. Here, confession rather takes the meaning of the revelation of one's sexual practices and pleasures primarily to scientists, doctors and psychiatrists (Sarup, 1993: 71), who in this time (the 17th and 18th centuries) begin to be established – with the advance of scientific knowledge – as acclaimed professionals, and need – because of the changing social conditions – to make people's lives (their sexual lives as well) the focus of their attention for the reasons explained in section 1.1.2. The involvement of the authorities in people's private worlds and the recording of their sexual behaviours were not intentional, then, in the sense that they were not specifically masterminded by any particular individuals. They were results of changing social conditions. As populations grew

and as people emerged as a labour force, it became essential that their whole existence was regulated but also that their well-being was protected and safeguarded against all vicissitudes of life, so that people could be efficiently used in the new conditions.

Foucault further argues that this involvement of the authorities did not have as its consequence the imposition of prohibitions only with regard to sex and specific sexual acts; the repression and negation of certain sexual practices and habits. He says that instead and additionally, it contributed to the production of detailed knowledge about people's use of the arts of sex. It helped both scientists and individuals alike – under the instructions of the scientific authorities – to realise how they could possibly make better use of the sexual practices but also and consequently helped them to understand how they could better treat their bodies and live their lives in general (also, Sheridan, 1980: 171, 193; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 211; Clegg, 2000: 139; Pratt, 1986; Shilling, 2000: 77). These knowledges Foucault tells us, have enabled individuals to understand and experiment themselves further with sexual arts, much more than one would imagine (Magill, 1997: 58). In another sense, Foucault's words also reveal that people were already experimenting with the art of sex and indeed always had been; they were living and feeling their bodies and were experiencing pleasures and disciplines and pains on their flesh, as they were practicing sex.

Foucault, then, does not use the notion of confession to deny the idea of control completely but to show how power might also be perceived as positively operating; as a positive force in itself. He demonstrates how the knowledge accumulated through confession about the subject, about people's tendencies, and the self-awareness of the subjects themselves through the subjection of their own bodies to the study, scrutiny and the gaze of scientists have led to a "maximisation of collective and individual forces" (THS, vol. 1: 24-5; also, Simons, 1995: 33; Lingis, 1999: 303). In other words, people learnt how to treat their bodies, and their well-maintained bodies – because of their subjection to study and regulation – came to perform better in the new conditions. Foucault shows the multiple positive effects of discussions and broader scientific discourses about people and sexuality produced by confession (Lingis, 1999: 301).

Yet, he never meant to deny that some strategies of power may have been in certain ways repressive, too, denying people the right to practice particular habits. What he wished to do instead was to show, with references to the width of sexual arts and the impositions of certain regulations to their practice, how “[power] follows the spiral path of setting limits to be transgressed and transgressing to set yet further limits” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 207-8; similar comment in Sheridan, 1980: 183). He wanted to illustrate how the strategy of confession was not necessarily blocking (the debate about) sexual practice and was not condemning people to silence or abstention. He wanted to show how it was, on the contrary, a means of *producing* sexuality (producing knowledge about it), bringing to light the multiple ways it was experienced and allowing people to play with it in many variations.

In confession, very much like in the case of the observation of deviants in DP, one should find not only people’s subjection to an authoritative regime aimed at control, but also the transgression of this regime (also, Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 243).

One comes to realise, once again, how power can be viewed as inherently multifaceted, variant and, even more so, as resistant, producing itself the conditions and practices of its own counter-attack (Sheridan, 1980: 186-7). In the case of THS this counter-attack of power by itself was becoming obvious in the fact that sexuality was debated and practised more than it was being silenced or prohibited by regulation. One could discern multiple, small, local revolutions in people’s (sexual) behaviours (PK: 123, 142). As Foucault said, what seemed to be an imposed veil of prohibitions and secrecy was simply the counterpart of a variety of discourses around pleasure (THS, vol. 1: 27, 30). And he concluded elsewhere:

‘Sexuality’ [has been] far more of a positive product of power than power was ever repression of sexuality. (PK: 120)

It is only because of the multiplicity of pleasures, their infinity (analogous to the infinity of the networks of power that bring them to light and re-produce them), that rules regarding sexuality can be imposed and transgressed. And it is through our study and knowledge of the existence of all these practices, prohibitions and

transgressions that we can understand how power/knowledge and resistance exist concurrently.

In this time when the population was becoming an “economic and political problem”, as many gathered in the cities to work in the developing industries, as many came to live under the same roof in big apartment blocks, they all needed protection, some money, health care. Therefore,

[i]t was essential that the state knew what was happening with its citizens’ sex, and the use made of it, but also that each individual [was] capable of controlling the use made of it. Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions set upon it (THS 26).²³

Sexuality and people’s health and wellbeing came to mean almost the same thing. And they were not only issues for the individuals to regulate but primarily for the state. It was through maintaining people’s health, through controlling and protecting it, that the state would be able to maintain itself and maximise its forces and individual potentials, as such. The knowledge of the issues around sexuality further gave back to individuals a *right* to health (enabled them to demand health), a right to life, a right to further enjoy a number of pleasures. In other words, it empowered them. People were the objects of study and analysis and scientific debate. Yet at the same time they were also the subjects of an experience of knowledge and maximisation of their capacities (PK: 234; similarly, Sheridan, 1980: 191).

However, none of the aforementioned should be taken to imply that all these actions, pleasures but also limitations in sexual behaviour, were something that people consciously and purposefully pursued. Their behaviours and relations were not something “built up out of [their] wills (individual or collective), nor [was] it derivable from [their] interests” (PK: 188). They were (they are), as we were also shown by Foucault in DP, an effect of myriad relations working across the whole social field.

²³Also, Marks, 2004: 140. Consequently, ideas of healthism, fitness and pleasure started to be promoted in this period.

The purpose of Foucault's accounts, as I have repeatedly argued, has been to show not who created these relations – because in his view they could not have been created by anyone specifically – but why, when and how these practices and relations actually arose.

With these comments Foucault seems to deny the idea of the 'subject' – a person who is able to determine and control one's fate and 'define' and acquire or possess, in this sense, power. Furthermore, by presenting the body as the effect of power relations it is as if he is denying that the body can actually exist or experience life beyond regulation, beyond control, beyond knowledge, beyond power. The forces of power seem to work independently of people's wills. However, as I will come to demonstrate later, this is not necessarily the case. As I will come to show, people are not only able to exercise power, according to Foucault, but also to resist it and make themselves relatively free from it. Moreover, people are able to feel that their bodies live and experience the world in their own ways.

2.2.2. Power and the Sexual Body

In THS, the bodies of individuals - the loci of exercise of sexual pleasure – find themselves once again, inevitably, in the middle of power relations. These relations may seem at first sight to be operating solely at the level of discourse (namely, as discussions, confessions and/or sets of prohibitions or announcements and presentations of findings on the arts of sex in the relevant scientific communities). But during that period too, "[d]iscourse ... had to trace the meeting line of the body and the soul" (THS, vol. 1: 20). Only now discussion was not concerned with the treatment and care of the body and soul of the imprisoned subject. It was concerned with the body and soul, the tendencies and lived experiences of every individual as a sexual being, the man, the woman, the child, the pervert, the Malthusian couple. The state saw itself as having to care for and regulate the sexual life of all people, regardless of age, gender, class or nationality (THS, vol. 1: 104-105).

It was this time that the "positive economy of the body and of pleasure" (PK: 190) would begin to be examined and measured, in order to understand what (the

bodies of) individuals were capable of (Sarup, 1993: 61). We thus return to the issue of observation, examination and training of the body, which we also find in DP (also, Jay, 2003: 19). This time though, as I have mentioned, it is the body-politics of the whole population (the *bio-politics*) rather than the anatomo-politics of existence as such (the study of each body separately) that was happening (Sheridan, 1980: 192). Foucault argues:

[T]he political significance of the problem of sex is due to the fact that sex is located at the point of intersection of the discipline of the body and the control of the population (PK: 125).

2.2.3 *The Notion of Resistance and the Ethical Construction of the Self*

The first volume of THS bears certain similarities to DP. Apart from the fact that the descriptions are concerned roughly with the same historical period (see, Sarup, 1993: 59), Foucault's main argument regarding power – namely, that it is not only a negative force but also a positive one – develops along similar lines. In these two pieces of work, Foucault shows us how as individuals and as objects we are caught up in the social order; how we are *produced* by and through our relations with the other elements of the social world. He demonstrates how our bodies are inescapably caught up in these relations, the nexuses of power, in networks and techniques (such as observation, judgement and the subjection to disciplines). And yet on both of these occasions, Foucault also appears to be favouring the idea of the *positivity* of power and the possibility of resistance to it. In fact, he defines power as a 'material' inherently resistant. Foucault goes against the more classical view that perceives power and resistance as two separate sets of forces that fight each other (see, Lloyd, 1997: 82; Butler, 1999(a): 13).

In the third part of THS (1990: *The Care of the Self*)²⁴, Foucault reserves some space to deploy the idea of resistance more analytically as part of the various mechanisms of power and to discuss the notion of freedom. He comes to show how we as individuals may learn to 'craft' or 'negotiate' our identities in ways that would allow us to experience relative freedom within the complex nexuses of power

²⁴ From this point onwards in this Chapter, the references to THS will concern volume 3, unless otherwise indicated.

relations (also Danaher et al, 2000: 117). He comes also to show how our bodies become the means and loci of resistance to power (also Butler: 1999(a): 13-14).

It is not the discourses around sexuality in their 17th century form which are the focus of this volume. Nor is it those alleged powerful, liberating, knowledge producing ‘silences’ of Victorian sexual bodies – silences that break up at the time of confession. What are of interest in this book are specific sexual practices that are viewed by Foucault as creating an ethical self in relation to others and, in this sense, as I will show, a self able to resist the social forces that bring it into action.

This form of talk about the self as able to resist power that is often considered to be a shift by Foucault towards an idea of subjectivity that he always seemed to have denied previously in his writings. It seems like a *Grand Refusal* to the very mechanisms of power (more on the issue in Eckermann, 1997: 155; also, Dupond and Pearce, 2001: 125, 140, 143; O’Donnell, 2003: 756). However, this is not actually the case, as I will demonstrate in what follows.

Foucault refers to the ancient Greeks initially and later to the philosophers of imperial Roman times and to the deployment of their ideas on the self, the “cultivation of the self” and the knowledge of the self through the arts of sex. He illustrates how a number of regimens regulated people’s sexual conduct but also how people experimented with these regimens (THS: 47, 51). These latter references about experimentation with the sexual arts have played an important role in an understanding like the one outlined above, that people resisted the rules of sexual conduct and that resistance was separate from power (power perceived as the set of norms that regulated sexuality) rather than inherently related to it (see, Barron, 2000: 294, n. 7; contra, Robinson, 2003: 122).

The existence and prevalence of principles “wherein the relations of oneself to oneself were intensified and valorised” (THS: 43) seem further to allow for an understanding that people could act independently of social restrictions. For example, the perception of those societies that “one is answerable only to oneself, ... one exercises over oneself an authority that nothing limits or threatens” (THS: 65), almost uncontrollable by the rest of the group, can be used to justify interpretations of this kind. However, one should bear in mind that for Foucault:

the final goal of all the practices of the self still belongs to an ethics of control (THS: 65).

In the third volume of the *History*, Foucault describes more analytically how the technologies and the regimens that govern the arts of sex, regulate individuals' bodies, thoughts and conduct (THS: 86, 124-144). These technologies and regimens include the introduction to the arts of sex itself, specific dietary and ascetic practices that relate to and surround sexuality like the enjoyment of sex at specific times, nutritional advice, the use of sex according to the other person's age and status. However, there are variant ways in which one can practise sex and learn to regulate one's conduct, Foucault further seems to argue. And people learn to resist certain power forces that regulate sexual conduct on the very basis of a constant experimentation with the multiple arts of sex. Only by allowing themselves to make use of the sexual arts can they actually understand sexuality and the rules that regulate it and transgress the latter (THS: 238-239; relevant discussion in Lloyd, 1997: 90; Dumm, 2002: 23; Brewis, 2000: 167; Cooper and Blair, 2002: 526)²⁵.

Foucault further shows how an ethics of control and the practices of the self develop precisely from, and because of, the experimental use of the various arts of sex. It is the play at the limits of our knowledge of these arts of sex that constitutes and facilitates resistance, as it produces knowledges about our sexuality, our existence, our selves (also, Simons, 1995: 17). In spite of the fact that these sexual practices may be experimental (and in that sense they might give the impression that they are instinctive, unruly, undisciplined and therefore somehow oppositional to the accepted rules of conduct), Foucault demonstrates that they are in fact subject to the constraints of time and other forces that I have just mentioned. He shows, in this sense, how they lead to the creation of 'mastered' individuals (THS: 95). What he is ultimately demonstrating is that even these practices are effects of a variety of relations of power that always catch people up in their mechanisms.

But although he concludes that power as a cluster of relations may be inescapable, Foucault also emphasises that its exercise always presumes a free subject; a subject able and enabled to experiment with and knowledgeable of the arts

²⁵ Again, there is an issue about Foucault's knowledge and interpretation of the practices and idea(l)s of the worlds that he speaks about (see, McL Currie, 1986: 191).

of sex – the arts of living, in general (also, Clegg, 2000: 144; Lacombe, 1996: 233). Therefore, the fact that the author refers to the practices of the self as practices of resistance does not mean that he re-invents subjectivity as formed independently from broader social relations. On the contrary, Foucault speaks about the formation of subjects (through techniques of power) in relation to each other and in accordance with broader existing social standards (THS: 53). It is this wide range of relations of power that no one can escape but also through which one comes to be constituted as a resisting, capable individual and as a social being (Pratt: 1986; Lupton, 1996: 14). It is this variety of force relations that enables one to enact power in different ways and resist it in others (THS: 50; similar analyses in Lloyd, 1997: 78; Nettleton, 1997: 217; Sheridan, 1980: 184; Dupont and Pearce, 2001: 144; Sawicki, 1988: 185; Danaher et al, 2000: 79).

The practices of the self were practices that allowed people to work with and on themselves, allowed an examination and understanding of the mechanisms of power (of these relations that constituted people as individuals in relation to others) through introspection (THS: 89; also, Cooper and Blair, 2002: 513). In this sense one could say that knowledge and power united, again primarily within the self, to ‘form’ one’s subjectivity, to ‘create’ a person and enable him/her to acquire further knowledge and exercise power, as they appeared to do in Foucault’s other writings²⁶. As Lupton argues, for Foucault the practices of the self are:

the ways in which individuals internalise modes and rules of behaviour, emotion and thought and apply them in everyday life. The practices of the self represent the site at which discourses and physical phenomena may be adopted as part of the individual’s project to construct and express one’s subjectivity. ... The practices of the self are the ways in which individuals respond to external imperatives concerning self-regulation and comportment, how they recognise them as important or necessary and incorporate these imperatives into everyday life. Such practices ‘inscribe’ or ‘write’ upon the body, marking and shaping it in culturally specific ways which are then ‘read’ or interpreted by others (1996: 15).

The construction of the self through the arts of sex, Foucault adds, became an art in itself – a process highly valued and considered as virtuous by cultures which

²⁶ We may recall that in DP the inmate of the penitentiary acquired knowledge of certain rules of conduct and skills that enabled one to reconstruct, reinvent oneself.

appreciated how people related to each other. In societies where the common good was a priority, knowing how to relate to others and relating well with them was important. This does not imply though that in constructing one's self as a work of art, one was inspired by and aiming at an abstract 'aesthetic' ideal, as some may suggest (Barron, 2000: 295). The making of one's self as a work of art consisted primarily of the ruling, of the regulating of one's conduct. It consisted of the respectability of the others partaking in the sexual act through a whole range of experiments with the art of sex that was followed by introspection. This (the regulation of one's conduct and the consideration and evaluation of one's conduct) was "ethical" as an act or practice because it produced knowledgeable people who were aware of their potentials but also, and primarily, individuals that cared not only about their own pleasure but about the others involved with them in the arts of the sex and about others around them in general. 'Art' consisted, then, in the making of a self which could relate ethically to others on any occasion. It was a process of subjectification not related to an abstract ideal of beauty (Simons, 1995: 76). The process of control of oneself and one's sexuality was one that helped one understand the structure and functioning of society where one lived and one's own position in it. As Foucault tells us, behind (sexual) ethics:

is [precisely] the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and its independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others, of the procedures by which it exerts control over itself, and of the way it can establish a complete supremacy over itself (THS: 32).

In those societies where the rule was to protect the common interest, the common good, and for others, it came as no surprise that making oneself a work of art was an ethical demand that came to be practised by each and all:

[it] became rather general in scope. ... [It] took the form of an attitude, a mode of behaviour; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications and at times even to institutions (THS: 44-5).

It made one relate ethically to others.

In a society that deplored and rejected individualism (the practice of *idioteuein*) and that pursued as an ethos the engagement with public affairs (the *koina*), the understanding of oneself in relation to others, as a product of these relations to others, the making of the self as a work of art, was also a fundamentally political act (similarly, Lloyd, 1997: 81; Nettleton, 1988: 218; Brewis, 2000: 168). It was an act that was meant to characterise the ruled and rulers in equal measure (THS: 89). But how could this act of control of the self be seen simultaneously as both a liberating and resisting practice?

To answer this question and justify where power resides for Foucault on this occasion, let us first recall that Foucault did not consider power relations necessarily as “antithetical” to freedom (Magill, 1997: 54-5). He distinguished between relations of power and relations of domination and, for him, it was only within the first that freedom could be exercised (Magill, 1997: 66). Moreover, it would probably be inappropriate to view the discussion of the principle of the care of the self on its own as a *suggestion* of a practice that could lead to liberation from oppression (Magill, 1997: 64). Rather, the care of the self should be seen as the outcome of the ideology of an era that required the understanding of selves precisely as they stood in relation to others for the promotion of the common good (also, Lloyd, 1997: 79-81, 99). It should be viewed as the result of experimentation with the self or as the result of experimenting with practices of self-control and a routine of introspection that followed them (Magill, 1997: 57, 72). According to Foucault, this experimentation with and problematisation of people’s reality (both social and physical) was what constituted resistance – an experimentation and problematisation that was the effect of people’s participation in power nexuses, their understanding, appreciation and negotiation of these nexuses and the acknowledgement of the opportunities that individuals had to change them from within (also, Lloyd, 1997: 98; Brewis, 2000: 168).

Yet, Foucault does not seem to explain why this introspection and problematisation of reality may lead some to adopt modes of resistance that are different from those of other people or even to follow practices that may seem

completely non-resistant (Brownlie, 2004: 516-7, 519²⁷). Neither does he specify forms of resistance which might be seen as more effective or more successful than others. Given all he has said about the ubiquity and continuity of power though, about the fact that it is multifaceted, and about resistance being related to power, it seems both impossible and impracticable that he could actually have made any comment or suggestion of this kind in his work. Thus, following Magill, we could ask instead: is “resistance the only source of freedom in relation to power” for Foucault? (1997: 61). The answer should be negative.

[I]f power is creative and productive, if it trains and develops skills in individuals, why should it not be thought of as sometimes enabling and extending the options of individuals (even as it closes off others)? (Magill, 1997: 61)

One has to remember that for Foucault it is always the case that:

[t]he subject is not self-determining but an effect of power. The more the modern subject seeks to know [himself/]herself, and the more s[/h]e seeks to resist power and be self-determining, the more effectively s[/h]e will be enmeshed in power And just as power as power encloses, constitutes and sustains the subject, it is also intertwined with the supposed means of her[/his] emancipation: knowledge. All the means of acquiring self-knowledge – reflection, introspection and self-scrutiny, inference, analysis and so on – will involve models or identities that serve to sustain and develop the mechanisms of power (Magill, 1997: 58).

It is in this sense that power can be liberating, resisting and productive; as it is multifaceted and opens for us many ways of action; as it engages us in its games but also allows us to understand how its effects on us can be compatible with its multiple effects on others; as it helps us realise what we want or aspire to be like in relation to others (Magill, 1997: 62).

The practices of the self, as previously described, are “freeing” when pursued because they are equally multiple, as are relations of power. And they broaden our options for understanding power’s functions (also, Simons, 1995: 125). They provide us with knowledge (Magill, 1997: 74). They enable us to understand not only

²⁷ Foucault’s analysis of resistance, like much of his work, is often seen as equally abstract and conceptual.

ourselves and our actions, but also others, the community around us, its function, society's function and our behaviour in relation to all of these (similar discussion in Cooper and Blair, 2002: 514, 524; Brewis, 2000: 170). They do not constitute us only as individuals. The care and the aesthetics of the self reflect upon others as well, constitute us *in relation to others*, as it is the others in ourselves that we try through introspection to understand (Lloyd, 1997: 81, 95). In that sense they are ethical and because of this they enable us to be free (Bernauer and Rasmussen, 1988: 3, 6-7).

2.2.4. *The Body as Work of Art*

I started this thesis by arguing that Foucault's contribution to the sociology of the body has been significant and by noting that in his accounts the body is seen as playing an important role in helping us understand the exercise of power. The practices and ethics of the self, as Foucault argues in the last volume of THS, are also elements of power. As such they are also written upon the body. The construction of ourselves as works of art begins from and reflects constantly upon our bodies.

In the last part of THS, where Foucault deals with the intensified medical and ethical discourses constructed around the use of the *aphrodisia* (the sex arts) in ancient Greece and later in Rome (THS: 57), it is possible to see that these discourses do not appear in the form of what is right or wrong, what is sinful or approved by the gods. Yet, these discourses are said to be ethical as they reflect the care of the self and of others and the care of one's body as a "fragile" carrier of the *technes* (arts) of sexuality, whose functioning and productivity has to be guaranteed under careful, specific regimens, for the sake of those others sharing with one the experience of sexual arts (THS: 122-4).

Observation of sexual behaviour, Foucault tells us, created knowledge not only about the individual him/herself but also about the body itself as a means and site of a variety of experiences and about its usefulness and capacities (THS: 142). Knowledge further produced discourse, discussions about sexuality and the body, and discourse led again to introspection; to the understanding of the self as a being; as a bodily being, a material being in relation to others. Ultimately, it produced

knowledge concerning the understanding of the mechanics of power on the body, the understanding of the body itself as a material of power (Robinson, 2003: 135).

Body and soul became interrelated in the construction of the self as work of art (THS: 136). The soul submitted the body to rules, to control, to mastery. But it was itself the product of rules and relations of power, and was exposed to myriad possible counterattacks from the material body itself (also, Lingis, 1999: 304); the body that has always lived pleasures, that feels torment and pain, the body that is experimenting, that is juxtaposing its existence with the imperatives of culture. What is important keeping in mind here is precisely Foucault's view that the body is, thus, throughout history able to elude culture.

2.3. Discipline, Sexuality and Critique

I argued in section 1.1.4. that a great number of analysts have attempted to re-interpret and examine, both theoretically and empirically, the writings of Foucault in the decades that followed his death. There has also been though a vast amount of criticism often directed against Foucault. It is admittedly DP and THS that have most usually attracted the critics' arrows for reasons that I will now explain.

Foucault's references to discipline, coercion, punishment and the exclusion and isolation of individuals in DP, as well as his discussions of the placement of the modern subject under the eyes of the scientists in THS, the scientists who seem to direct the discourses, debates and knowledges about the subject itself and to create information about it, have often led to him being criticised for concentrating only on the suffocating, almost dictatorial forms of control that societies impose upon us. They have led to accusations that Foucault has been unable to show the more positive aspects of social relations and transformations, of power relations namely, or has done so at best unconvincingly and without precision (see also relevant discussion in Magill, 1997: 66). His arguments about the inescapability of the networks of power (especially the gaze but also the other techniques) have often opened the way for him to being portrayed as a "prophet of entrapment" (Simons, 1995: 3, 83; similarly, Szokolczai, 1998: 1405). His views on the contribution of the new regime and of the effects of the new modes of exercise of power on production,

on the production of knowledge about the subject and to the advance of society have often been ignored (Dumm, 2002: 73).

Some say that Foucault reduces the individual precisely to a “socialised parrot” who cannot escape the social forces that create one as being (see relevant discussion in Turner: 1996: 173; Eckermann, 1997: 154). They further argue that the French philosopher assumes the general effects of these forces in the creation of the individuals without actually scrutinising them. They claim that he is, in reality, ignoring the possibility of any form of resistance against the forces and relations that create the modern subject. In short, they say that he denies the modern subject any sort of agency.

It is true that the net result in Foucault’s account is admittedly “that there is no standing outside of power, no-one escapes, no-one is allowed to give up” (Pratt, 1986; also Clegg, 2000: 140). But those who level all these claims against him seem to forget that power’s omnipresence does not necessarily imply only coercion. On the contrary, as Pratt (1986) reminds us, power can be a positive force: “by virtue of the fact of its universality, power is able to encircle the individual body: by virtue of the fact of its *positivity* [added emphasis] it is able to ... produce” a number of useful effects and materials for the benefit of all members of society and to allow subjectivity to emerge from a synthesis of various antithetical and heterogeneous effects produced by the operation of power. Those who accuse Foucault for the reason presented above neglect the fact that for him power and in particular “meditative practices and ascetic techniques may in fact bring about a change at the level of the self” (Szakolczai, 1998: 1404).

Foucault’s major concern in DP and elsewhere was to pin down the way in which certain techniques of power, especially in the context of disciplinary ... institutions, are able to bring about such transformation. ... Disciplinary techniques form subjectivities and transform identities exactly because they mobilise ascetic exercises developed in antiquity in order to help individuals survive the dissolution of order and social distress (Szakolczai, 1998: 1404-5).

In many instances the philosopher’s critics overlook the fact that, while

agency should not be seen as sovereign, because the agent is constructed within social conditions which are not of their own making and remains the subject of those conditions, [his] ideas do reinstate the agency of the subject as an issue for discussion (Burkitt, 1998: 493).

Foucault does that by arguing precisely that the subject has the ability to negotiate the forces of power and by further claiming that the body of the subject can experiment in numerous ways with the conditions of the world that surround it.

Other censors focus on the failures of the institutions that Foucault describes and on the failures of the disciplinary techniques that these institutions employ to produce something which actually benefits the modern subject or to produce a truly useful modern subject. They demonstrate, for example, how the prison system reproduces criminality and thus deny the existence of positive effects of the disciplinary mechanisms used by the prison (section 2.1.7.). In so doing, however, these people forget that Foucault is not so much concerned with describing institutions per se but with illustrating the broader practices upon which they operate (relevant discussion in Driver, 1994: 119). They forget that it is precisely the infinity, multiplicity and diversity of these practices and of the elements that constitute power that he advocates. They forget that he provides a variety of reasons for the exercising of power and for the variety of scopes that it serves. They attribute some purposefulness or character – such as the one merely to punish or coerce or correct or repress – to power that, according to Foucault, it lacks. They forget that Foucault is talking about *disciplinary* institutions and societies (units wherein power operates employing the techniques described earlier in this chapter) rather than strictly disciplined, oppressed ones (see, also, PK: 105, 255; Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 188). They fail to see the failures of the systems as possible parts or effects of the function of power in its diversity and equally fail to acknowledge the contribution of these very failures to the production of knowledge about power's operation and character (Cousins and Hussain, 1984: 197; Pratt, 1986). They ignore the fact that Foucault has suggested that relations of power do not solely work in a negative direction (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 143) and do not only constrain (Lupton, 1996: 14), overlooking the very essence of his thesis; that power is multifaceted.

Foucault himself would probably attribute interpretations like the above to the following. Firstly, to the existence of the tradition in our world to represent power “in a more-or-less uniform fashion ... under a negative, ... juridical form” (PK: 201; also, Sarup, 1993: 73). He explains that we are used to connecting power with specific individuals or classes of individuals, following a more or less feudal perception of the concept, rather than seeing it as a set of practices. He argues, though:

[I]t seems to me ... that the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law that says no ... Now I believe this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread (PK: 119).

And he continues:

Such theories still continue today to busy themselves with the problem of sovereignty. What we need, however, is a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the King's head: in political theory that has still to be done (PK: 121).

The fact that Foucault breaks with this feudal tradition of theorising power makes his work at times difficult or even inconvenient for some other writers to follow, particularly those in whose interest might be to maintain personified accounts of power, in order to be able to specifically deal with issues of accountability. Admittedly Foucault's account does not always seem to leave much room for discussing accountability or specific forms of change or of particular means to achieve change in social relations and conditions.

A further important aspect of the construction of these criticisms, however, is Foucault's use of the idea of the existence of a “carceral continuum” in society; namely, of the notion that the practices of the prison have expanded across the whole social field. The example is again associated with the notion of power in its traditional juridical form and therefore makes it hard for us to treat the penitentiary as a potentially non-repressive mechanism. We should keep in mind though that the

description of the spread and penetration of the techniques of the prison throughout society is nonetheless only an example. It may provide a negative image of power but this is only so because we are used to talking about prisons in this way. In reality, this is a case that has been chosen by Foucault to be analysed precisely because of its obviousness and clarity (Sheridan, 1980: 165). It has been chosen in order to show us that power is not something that is necessarily “carrying the force of a prohibition” or that should be understood in terms of good and evil only (PK: 119). As Foucault tells us:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (PK: 119).

He adds:

In *Discipline and Punish* what I wanted to show was how, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards, there was a veritable take-off in the productivity of power. ... There was established at this period what one might call a new ‘economy’ of power, that is to say procedures which allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and ‘individualised’ throughout the entire social body. These new techniques are both much more efficient and much less wasteful (PK: 119).

In parallel to the accusations that Foucault is providing an incomplete and unclear theory of power (discussion in Burkitt, 1998: 495; Pratt, 1986), others claim that he is not suggesting a coherent strategy of resistance and offers insufficient evidence that we can ever actually become self-governing subjects (see for more on the matter, PK: 256; O'Donnell, 2003: 756; Magill, 1997: 64; Danaher et al, 2000: 31; Simons, 1995: 59; Connolly in Dumm, 2002: xxiii). Critics argue that the French philosopher is extremely vague and ambiguous in responding to these matters:

[T]he resistance to power notion ... can appear to be glib and unrealistic, a trite statement rather than a political strategy ... how are we to evaluate one form of resistance against another? (Pratt: 1986)

But as others explain:

Because this ... approach addresses without necessarily choosing among various ethical systems, some commentators have concluded that [Foucault] was an ethical relativist – an impression of Foucault that we believe to be mistaken ... Foucault did indeed advance a normative ethic predicated in freedom. Foucault himself described ethic as “the practice of freedom”: “Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (p. 284) Foucault was clearly envisioning an ethic that maximises freedom *by always subjecting the taken for granted to questions and creative adaptation – remaining open to new understandings and forms of relationship*.

Such an ethical account certainly departs from a tradition in which ethical principles are seen as universally applicable and serve as broad standards for judging ideas and actions. Foucault’s ethic ... encourages an interrogative attitude more than a judgmental one (Cooper and Blair, 2002: 525). [Added emphasis]

In other words, Foucault is suggesting resistance through a critical examination of what happens around us and of the situations which we find ourselves in. As I have argued previously though (section 2.2.3.), given the way Foucault formulates his argument and the way he talks about a variety of power networks that work in different, even contradictory directions, suggesting a specific method of resistance would have been in any case both unnecessary and impossible.

Related to this is the following criticism: some single out what they call the ‘logical impasse’ that Foucault even mentions resistance at all. Precisely because he has defined power as a mechanism that cannot be identified only with repression (Sarup, 1993: 82) and is associated with resistance anyway, it is utterly incomprehensible, they claim, that he refers to the notion (also, Clegg, 2000: 140). At the same time, however, they acknowledge that Foucault’s contribution is precisely that he has advised us to avoid thinking of power and resistance in rigid terms or providing easy answers to the aforementioned questions (Sarup, 1993: 80, 82; also, Pratt, 1986).

Another answer to this issue could be that, because Foucault wanted to emphasise the positive effects of the function of power, he made use of this word

(resistance), implying that there can be indeed various ways for us to “cut off the King’s head” (PK: 121). But again to become more specific than that, given that he believes in a form of power that produces the conditions for multiple counter-offences to its own function (PK: 255-6), specific recommendations on how to react to this operation – as if one were outside the nexus of relations that constitute power – would be impracticable (Pratt: 1986; Driver, 1994: 128).

Moving away from the definitions of power, resistance and discipline as such, other critics have further claimed that what Foucault described – namely, living in disciplinary societies that educate and cure us, that teach us through discipline how to lead our lives – is no longer the case. We have entered, they say, an era of different, total control. We live in communities, in groupings wherein individuals are unable to self-reference and self-expression. We are constantly monitored. And we are no longer parts of a system that can make use of our individual forces but parts of a system that treats us merely as masses, as codes, as data, as samples and “banks” – parts of a system wherein everything is fixed in advance and wherein we have lost our energy and individuality and relation with the rest of society (and possibly our ability to resist, one could add). We are now part of a broader, abstract unit that society has become, a number in the lot (Deleuze, 1992; also, Valier, 2004: 251). Foucault, these critics say, does not show us how disciplinary techniques may have themselves changed in ways that may lead us to talk about the operation of new forms of power (also, Driver, 1994: 128).

The argument may seem valid but how far we may have come from disciplinary societies remains to be further examined. It is worth looking at how people may be able to resist discipline in this new system, if it indeed exists, and how considerably or if at all the so-called transition into the new era of power has actually affected our lives. We could also possibly consider if this transition is something that Foucault’s theory can accommodate or even presuppose, broad as it had been and ‘dominated’ by this idea of multifariousness of power²⁸.

²⁸ For instance, the fact that power nowadays may have passed from the human guardians of the previous eras to inanimate machines that may be serving the purpose of control, is not something that contradicts essentially Foucault’s account. The design of machines of control presupposes an awareness of social change by the population – both those who are called to make them but also those who use them – that probably prevents us from saying that we live in societies where machines and artifacts have absolute dominance over our behaviour and that we are unaware of how to control ourselves or make use of these technologies. It seems more plausible to argue that we live in

As I mentioned in the introduction, another (the last one in this list) equally substantial point of criticism against Foucault is his description and analysis of the social forces that invest and construct the body and his lack of reference to the actual, material potentials, attributes, dimensions and properties of the body that is being constructed by these forces (Shilling, 2000: 72, 80-1). In his defence, Foucault says that bodies are being made docile and useful, and explains how this is achieved and further adds that bodies can resist the forces that create them. In this sense he describes bodies as 'lived' and 'living' materials. Certainly, further references to the multiple dimensions of our materiality do not appear in his writings but this does not mean that the French philosopher has denied their existence.

Yet, it would be interesting to remember that the lack of extensive discussion of these issues, of our corporeality, is reflected also in the majority of the numerous accounts that attempt to interpret and further analyse the work of Foucault (see section 1.1.4.). Rarely is the body as substance discussed separately and extensively. This failure may even be reflected in the progress of this project so far. In spite of the fact that I started out talking about the impact of the work of Foucault in our theorising about the body in Chapter 1, only briefly have I talked about the body as an entity in this chapter that is about Foucault. I have mostly concentrated on representing and analysing his ideas on power and the character of power relations that invest the body, whilst I have taken somehow for granted its existence and the impact of the various force relations on it.

However, I think what is important to keep in mind here is that in spite of its existing difficulties, its elusiveness and abstraction, the work of Foucault is significant in that it has managed to re-position the body in sociological thought and make it the centre of our attention, even if he might have left it to others to develop accounts of the exact characteristics and experiences of our corporeality. As Horner and Keane argue:

environments where we can negotiate power even if its existence or operation become manifest in ways and through means that we have not been accustomed to up to now. And this is not to say that our bodies are completely unaffected by power in this new era, although one must acknowledge that they are *less directly* affected so. (For examples of these more technologically advanced modes of operation of power, see Latour, 1992: 226)

Foucault's work remains, ..., crucial to our understanding of the *discursive* production of 'bodies' and 'matter' (2000: 3).

I shall be returning to Foucault's views and the criticisms of his work throughout this thesis. For the moment, let me finish this chapter by summarising the common themes that appear in Foucault's major writings and clarify more extensively why I have chosen to study these texts together.

2.4. DP and THS in Perspective

I chose to deal with these particular writings, DP and THS, because I thought that they make clear Foucault's ideas about power (that it is multifaceted, omnipresent, positive, negative, resistant) and the use of the body by it.

Foucault has shown us that the important thing is not to attempt to define power in a concrete way but to mark the multiplicity of its modes of operation, through a number of examples from everyday life. The main thing for him was not to create a theory about power (Szokolczai, 1998: 1402-3) but to point to the various ways in which power can be sensed and interpreted and the way that the relations of power work. If this more *relativist* (Cooper and Blair, 2002: 525) approach to the concept is taken up by us, too, then enough room exists for an analysis of how one can construct oneself (one's body, primarily, since the body is the material upon which power-relations are inscribed) as work of art. Ultimately, this is an analysis of how one can also resist power, how one can make effective use of it and be liberated from it.

It is for the wide range of similarities that appear in these texts, as I have shown throughout this chapter, the use of the same analytical method (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 119), his talk about power, control and discipline but also of resistance and pleasure, that I have chosen to concentrate on them and look at them in depth but also treat them as complementary, as a continuum and a whole.

I have presented here the basic notions and ideas that appear in these texts: that of discipline, of normalisation of deviant behaviour, of the standardisation of behaviour of all citizens, of the multiplicity of power and the dispersal of power across the whole social field, of the notion of panopticism, of the notion that every

institution resembles the prison, and the idea that the practices of the prison break out of it to other social schemata (carceral continuum). I have also introduced and discussed the idea of the automatic functioning of power and the exercise of it by each upon one's self mechanically once one has learnt the rules of the system. Furthermore, I have talked about power as a productive force and also about the possibility of resistance to power in Foucauldian terms. I have discussed the ways in which, according to Foucault, power writes the body but have also briefly discussed how the body itself may resist the forces that invest it.

I have discussed matters that are going later to be of relevance to the analysis of the gym-culture. I have talked about power having its principle as a distribution of bodies, surfaces, gazes and so on and I shall illustrate in later chapters how these are all elements of the environment of the gym. I have talked about people experimenting with various practices of self-discipline and self-control, which I shall show is what also gym users are doing and which enables them to feel empowered.

In the part that follows I am going to demonstrate the impact of these Foucauldian texts and ideas in a number of fields of discourse within the discipline of sociology and will draw from them ideas for the interpretation of Foucault's work and of my own empirical material later on.

3. Foucault, Gender and the (Exercising) Body

I have already mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, that the writings of Michel Foucault have often been subjected to a wide range of interpretations which serve even antithetical purposes. Regardless of the specific aims of the authors who have provided these insights into the work of the French philosopher, however, what these perspectives also come to reveal is the richness of the texts that they aim to illuminate or contest. Each of these interpretations usually focuses on a specific aspect of the Foucauldian work and the sum total of these theses provides a clearer and fuller picture of his analytics of power. Some of these accounts also point to parts of Foucault's work that could have been perfected with further elaboration.

Given Foucault's interest in the issues of sexuality and the body (together with criminality and health), as I argued previously (section 1.1.5.; also, Szakolczai, 1998: 1408), it is not surprising that a wide range of insights into his work have developed mostly within the field of gender studies, where sex, sexuality and the bodies of men and women are highly debated.

In this chapter, I am going to borrow from a number of these 'gendered' accounts, in order to cast more light on the idea of the body as living, lived and experienced and as caught up in the social order, but also on the concepts of discipline, power/knowledge, pleasure and resistance, as used by Foucault and felt by/on people's bodies.

Consideration of these accounts will provide a whole range of practical examples related to the concepts just mentioned and will make up for the abstraction that often characterises the French philosopher's writings on our corporeality. These gendered accounts are more deeply 'embodied' than those of Foucault as they often use the flesh as the starting point of reference, for the reasons I will subsequently explain.

3.1. Foucault, Feminism and the Flesh

It is mostly in feminist theory and epistemology within the field of gender studies, that one can seek and find a number of interesting interpretations of the work

of Foucault. The vast majority of these interpretations are concerned with particular methods of disciplining the flesh (mainly the female flesh), which go beyond traditional forms of legal punishment and extend to a sphere of broader (social) 'penalty' (for relevant discussion and a justification of the use of the word penalty, see Garland, 1990: 131, 153; Howe, 1994: 83).

It is the historical and conventional association of women with materiality, with the flesh²⁹ – with the earthy, the irrational, the chaos, with ignorance – in comparison to the rational, wise, orderly men, and also the debate on the effects of the modes of operation of power on gender, gender relations and our gendered bodies that brings together feminist studies and the work of Foucault³⁰. In spite of the proximity and commonality of themes like body and power, however, one can also see why some feminist writers and Foucault do not enjoy a "romantic" relationship, to borrow Lydon's phrase (1988: 135). This is because many of these authors see power as a privilege of one category of people; of men only. The argument proposed by many (although certainly not all) feminist authors is that women do not have access to power and that, consequently, power relations always work to the favour of the male population. Men and power are, as many scholars in the field of men's studies would agree too, "intimately entwined together" (Hearn, 2003: 45).

Portraying some of the fluctuations that the affair between feminist authors and the French philosopher has gone through is, I feel, important here, as it enriches

²⁹ Women's materiality and their (subsequent) 'secondary' position in the world are discussed in various authors' work (see, De Beauvoir, 1953: 15; Young, 1990: 13; Shildrick & Price, 1999: 1, 8; Spelman, 1999: 33; Wilshire, 1989: 92; Kemp & Squires, 1997: 8; MacSween, 1993: 5; Russo, 1995:1, Worton, 1997:14). Other writings discuss female materiality in relation to the Foucauldian works (see, Diamond & Quinby, 1988: xi; Budgeon, 2003: 38). Many of these texts through their discussions also emphasise the plurality and diversity of feminist stances (Kemp and Squires, 1997: 8).

³⁰ A variety of studies, however, record a number of paradoxes concerning this association and demonstrate how men may often be seen as 'more embodied' than women. Gordon et al, for example, in their work on school children show that "it is the boys who are expected to be (and in general are) more physically active", whereas the "girls [are] more concerned with using their 'heads'" (2000: 85). Holland et al (cited in Gordon et al) note how young men – in spite of their insecurities and uncertainties about their physical attributes and performance – are, on the whole, more unproblematically embodied than women, who tend to demonstrate a much more significant alienation from their flesh (Gordon et al, 2000: 86), and conclude that it is precisely this alienation that "dissolves the dualism male/female in favour of the male". Whitson, in Mesner and Sabo (1990: 23), also demonstrates how boys, particularly through sport, "are encouraged to experience their bodies, in forceful, space-occupying" and "even dominating ways" and remarks in his conclusion that "[i]n contemporary Western culture, sport ... ritualises aggression and allows it to be linked with competitive achievement and, in turn, with masculinity" (1990: 27-8). These accounts illustrate men's

our understanding of Foucault's ideas, helps create a fuller picture of the issues related to power and gender but also helps us to better make sense of our body matters and the social world.

I would like to begin this part of my analysis by providing a brief definition of feminism and to continue with a more in-depth demonstration of the connection between certain feminist writings and the work of Foucault, borrowing a number of practical examples from these texts. The definition of feminism will be also useful, I believe, as it will enable me to show the limitations of many accounts on power and the body which are relevant to this study, the points where they overlap with each other, the points of departure from one another and the reasons why tensions might exist between them.

To define feminism, one would probably have to struggle more than one could imagine. The task is not an easy one because feminism, in spite of what it may seem, is an elusive and not at all self-evident or self-explanatory concept. It comprises or rather encompasses many diverse approaches, positions and strategies on several issues that preoccupy a large number of individuals in our contemporary societies (Rowbotham, 1992: 7; Banks, 1993: 3; Kemp & Squires, 1997: 3). One element may help epitomise it, however: feminism has been for the most part concerned with voicing and revealing the experiences, anxieties, pleasures and ultimately the histories of a certain category of people – women, and with changing their lives. On most of the occasions, the voices have been the voices of women themselves for and about their own experiences (Riley, 1988: 112).

Feminism started off as an ideology and a movement aiming at ending women's "specific oppression in relation to men" (Rowbotham, 1992: 6; also, Messner and Sabo, 1990: 1, 6). It was concerned with eliminating patriarchy as an autonomous system of social inequality, according to which men possessed all resources and power, dominated life and controlled their female counterparts (Walby, 1986: 22; Green et al, 1990: 4). Later, it came to be an ideology that took into account and protested against a number of relations of inequality in parallel to or at times even beyond gender (Walby, 1986: 51; Bell, 1993: 42).

embodied experiences and, in this sense, seem to go against the argument that emphasises the

The introduction to what came to be defined as the era of post-modernity³¹ brought new modes of theorising across disciplines and a number of changes that affected but also were reflected in the feminist movement. Advance in all spheres of knowledge, new conditions, new debates, observations, findings, understandings and information about our world and our existence led to a distancing from traditional, fixed classes or categories, to the transgression of established definitions and the questioning of the singularity and the scientific character of Truth (also section 1.1.6.).

All these have had a number of implications for feminism as well (Norris, 1992: 16; Nicholson, 1990: 3, 8). New attitudes to theorising and new perspectives and interpretations regarding women's encounters and feelings appeared, and the voices of more and more women came to be heard. It was not only the western, white, middle-class female members of society that had a say. It was women but not only them. Many more oppressed groups and individuals took advantage and made use of the principles of feminism to make their voices heard. The experiences of many more people who had been silenced up to then started to come to light. New methodologies came to be employed for the study of their issues; methodologies that approached the studied issues more caringly and humanely (Oakley, 1998). Researchers approached individuals and showed interest about their lives, offered an ear to their concerns and problems and reflected these people's situations using the studied individuals' narratives. Sociological study started moving away from the rigid, rationalistic doctrines of positivism, although in many instances it held on to a number of its values. It would not be wrong thus to say that within the context of postmodernity, feminist scholarship found fertile soil to evolve and develop and achieve a number of its aims (Nicholson, 1990: 5, 11). It had already by and large succeeded in bringing down most of the 'patriarchal dividends' of gender inequality, precisely by introducing gender as a theme of discussion (Kimmel, 2003: 20).

connection of women, only, with materiality.

³¹ See, section 1.1.6. for a brief definition of the 'post-modern'.

On the other hand, the very idea of transgressing established ideals and rigid dualisms as promoted in the context of postmodernity, the questioning of existing definitions and the deconstruction of scientific categories, were leading to an unprecedented relativism, blurring boundaries, understandings and perceptions of the classic social categorisations and divisions. It also, then, posed a number of problems for feminism. Now that divisions were not as rigidly defined as in the past, a number of questions started to be raised about various social matters that seemed quite clear in the past. One of these was who could or would be classified to speak as a 'woman'. How could women still be able to talk about and for themselves? Were they able to do this at all on their own or were there others that could speak on their behalf, too? If so, how beneficial would that be for them? What was to become of 'feminism' as a whole? These were some of the issues that the movement had to confront in this new context (Barrett, 1988: 96; Nicholson: 6, 14; also, Kemp and Squires, 1997: 145).

Another implication of post-modernity for feminism was that the latter would have to dissociate itself from some of its favourite themes, as they had often appeared in its proclamations and the relevant literature up to that point – for instance, the discussion of women's oppression. It would have to enable descriptions and interpretations to be made that would not simply relate to the control, subjection and subordination of women. Feminism would have to break up its tradition of complaints and worries about the alleged, persistent sufferings and victimisation of the people it had represented that far. It would have to welcome perspectives about women's powers, pleasures, potentials, resistances, and capabilities – notions that, as I have shown in the previous chapter, are also central to the work of Foucault (see also Martin, 1988: 11, 16; Morris, 1988, 33; Vance, 1997: 335, Sawicki, 1997: 182).

All these contributed to and even forced a change of focus; a replacement of the "monocausal and totalising theories of patriarchy" (Kemp and Squires, 1997: 6) with a debate on identity consciousness raising and shaping (Barrett, 1988: 63). Rather than attacking certain institutions (like patriarchy), attempts were made to discover the multiple meanings of womanhood and a variety of feminine identities (femininities) and to trace down the particular and variant features of these identities (Barrett, 1988: 86). Feminism thus entered a new phase; a more 'introspective' one

but also one characterised by variety and diversity – a phase during which more emphasis would be given to the construction (deconstruction and reconstruction) of the self as social being (Kemp and Squires, 1997: 8). In the new circumstances, feminists would be all those who would problematise a wide(r) range of issues related to gender (Bell, 1993: 47-8, 50, 56³²). Within the limits of feminism, should fall any attempt (whether at theorising or at acting) that worked in this direction, towards changing the lives of women and all other oppressed individuals for the better, but also towards theorising the multiple dynamics of social relations overall and the dynamics that developed within each gender category.

Having described a few aspects of the history of feminism, although I have admittedly not concentrated on specific political actions and have focused more on what could be called ‘academic feminism’ (see, Kemp and Squires, 1997: 51), I will now proceed with an examination of the relationship between certain studies that have been done within this theoretical context and the work of Foucault. Some of the accounts that I will use here draw clearly from the writings of Foucault. Others are not based directly upon his work, but one could identify points where they overlap or meet with it.

As I mentioned earlier, many would find it hard to claim that the French philosopher’s work can indeed be used to support the feminist cause – or claim in this sense that Foucault has been actually a “ladies’ man” (Morris, 1988: 26) – although Foucault himself has argued that the use of his theory to support a number of different causes, including feminism, would not be impossible (PK: 192-3). Even if at times it seems that in his work (particularly the THS) “bodies and pleasures appear to overcome the problem of sex and with that problem sexual difference itself” and although it seems as if for him “sex’ operates as an abstract monolith that regulates bodies in uniform ways” (Butler, 1999(a): 12) and thus allows us to see only the male body in his narratives (see Grosz in section 1.1.5.), on many occasions his writings reflect precisely the diverse ways in which sex and sexuality are constructed and come to reveal the condition of women and the ways in which womanhood and femininity are also constructed (Jackson & Scott, 1996: 9). The

³² See also her references to the work of Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York; London: Routledge, 1990) and Susan Bordo (‘Feminism, Postmodernism and

references to the treatment of the sexualised body of the ‘hysterical woman’ in THS (vol. 1: 104) may be one such example. Foucault shows us how, although we are all subjected to discipline, regardless of our age, gender, class, sexuality and other personal characteristics, these characteristics play an important role in the way that we are being disciplined.

Yet, given feminism’s long tradition of articulating the experiences of women and particularly their oppression by men, what many have come to contest from within the movement’s boundaries is Foucault’s idea that power relations do not imply the existence of some sort of monopoly, namely, the idea that there are no possessors of power. For many feminist authors power is always connected directly and exclusively to men. Foucault’s persistence in presenting power as a set of mobile and changing networks seems to have posed a threat to the very grounds of their arguments, to have posed a threat to specific political suggestions of theirs on how to reverse these conditions³³ (relevant discussion in Bell, 1993: 24, also section 2.3.).

Foucault has thus often been accused of not truly taking the sufferings of women into sufficient consideration, when he claims that power is dispersed, diffuse and belongs to everyone. He has been accused of having forgotten the “gendered” aspects of sexuality (relevant comments in McNay, 1992: 46-7; Sarup, 1993: 85; Braidotti in Sarup, 1993: 86), of ignoring the association of power with masculinity; of condemning women, the ‘second sex’ (as Simone De Beauvoir called us in 1953), once more to silence (Hartsock, 1990: 157-8).

A number of accounts elaborate and testify to these accusations. To these accounts I now turn.

3.2. Taming the Body: A Discussion on the Gender of Power

When in the 17th and 18th centuries the sciences and scientists began to get more involved in the study of the lives of the population, women were no exception.

Gender-Scepticism’ in Nicholson L., *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York; London: Routledge, 1990).

³³ We may recall that another accusation against Foucault is based on the fact that – although he talks about resistance – he does not make references to specific ways for resisting power. This has not been a very useful claim for those feminist authors who would have wanted a concrete political suggestion in order to reverse the specific form of power that, as they claim, men exercise over women.

In fact it was they who most often came under the public and scientific gaze as mothers, carers, providers of labour force, as workers and professionals of all kinds, and in a variety of other identities such as helpless victims of various criminal acts or as criminals themselves (Riley, 1988: 50). Equally, their bodies as the physical carriers of the prospective generations of the human race and bearers of new identities attracted all kinds of attention and became subjected to a variety of forms of study, surveillance and discipline. As Foucault explains:

[F]rom the moment the woman begins to take on importance in medico-social terms, with the connected problems of child-bearing, breast-feeding etc., at that point female [pathology] come to be in the order of the day (PK: 217).

A wide range of accounts on the regulation of women and their bodies which have flourished particularly over the last few decades verify and reflect precisely that women's problems came to be "in the order of the day". Some of these accounts speak from the viewpoint of the various penal measures implemented against women's bodies, others from a medical stance, others deal with the way women and their flesh are represented in the arts or with the ways in which women become gendered beings and are instructed into 'proper' femininity or with the ways they shape their bodies and the ways they live their daily lives³⁴. The conclusions, varying in terms of the actual rigidity of these regulatory techniques, may be categorised under two headings, which in effect reveal women's actual experiences; experiences of pleasure and pain. Surprisingly though, as I have already argued, the majority of the accounts of the female body are reflections of women's pains, silences and subordination to men.

In an attempt to introduce readers to some of the ideas that are going to be important for the analysis of the gym experience later, I am going to turn my focus now more specifically on those feminist accounts that are more closely concerned with the practices according to or through which women build, shape, construct and treat their bodies. So as to avoid confusion with particular means of exercise and

³⁴ See, Green et al, 1990: 113 ff for some characteristic examples from each field of women's lives.

training, such as body-building, I shall refer to these broadly as 'body shaping' practices (see also on the use of this terminology, Mansfield and McGinn, 1993: 51).

The significance of these accounts for this project further lies in the frequent elaboration of the ideas of punishment, panopticism (surveillance), multiplicity of disciplinary techniques, automation of the exercise of power (without it being necessary that specific disciplinarians exist and without the people subjected to it realising that they are actually subjected to power's mechanisms but believing, instead, that they have control over their decisions), internalisation of the social laws through introspection, the normalisation of individuals, production, sexuality, knowledge, resistance and the body as used by Foucault and their very mixture with the notions of patriarchy, gender and gender identity.

I will show that the authors of these accounts, in spite of the fact that they use a number of Foucault's ideas in their work also criticise him for having been blind "to [the] disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is particularly feminine" (Bartky, 1988: 62-63). They show how women's bodies may be, in fact, constructed to be more docile (docile to patriarchy, that is) than useful (see, also, Gordon et al: 2000: 91). Ultimately, they accuse Foucault of having provided us with a partial analysis of the concept of power (Bartky, 1988: 64).

The majority of these studies examine the aforementioned ideas in relation to specific contemporary cultural phenomena like people's (mainly women's) preoccupation with thinness or women's preferences for certain modes of training that again help them achieve thinness as an aspect of beauty. Indeed, as femininity and the flesh are connected, similarly in many of these analyses beauty and the female body seem to go hand in hand (Davis, 1995: 39). The practices that women use in order to achieve this aim of beauty are seen by many of the writers as reproducing the existing social order that places men at the top of the hierarchy of genders. Mansfield and Maguire (1999) deal in their work with the issue of women's preference for aerobic training, while Susan Bordo (1988), Sandra Lee Bartky (1988), Liz Eckermann (1997) and others provide detailed and interesting accounts of the more general obsession with slenderness, in order to show how gender order is being reproduced.

Surprisingly, some of these authors at times view analogous practices as “erasing racial, class and other differences” and insist that “all women aspire to a coercive, standardized ideal” that of the slim, toned, woman (Bordo, 1989: 16).

The bodily model that women are made to aspire to, follow and construct themselves like, these writers say, is a small, slender, passive one, of almost infant looks. It is a model that constantly facilitates the enhancement of and reconfirms male power, as it minimises female individuals and allows only their muscular, well-built male counterparts clearly to be seen and to prevail (Bordo, 1989: 18; Bordo, 1990: 86; Eckermann, 1997: 158; Battersby, 1999: 347; Davis L.R., 1990: 154-5, 158; Young, 1990: 150, 155). Women pursue this model seemingly on their own but, in reality, do not understand, so the argument goes, that their behaviour ends up benefiting only men. Women do not realise that they re-produce the ideal of thinness, and consequently their own oppression, in making their bodies so through training or dieting. They do not realise that they become small and unnoticeable³⁵.

Additionally, women are portrayed in these accounts as doing everything for men, as they learn from a very early age their inferiority. Men, on the contrary, when they look after their body, when they exercise, when they do something for their beauty, are portrayed as doing everything for themselves (Dutton, 1995: 236). They appear, then, as more active, more determined, more aware of what they want, more powerful.

³⁵ In other words, many of these writers base their analyses on Foucault's words that “a dominant class” – men in this case – “isn't a mere abstraction but neither is it a pre-given entity. For a class to become a dominant class, for it to ensure its domination and for that domination to reproduce itself is certainly the effect of a number of pre-meditated tactics operating within the grand strategies that ensure this domination” (PK: 203) – like heterosexuality or patriarchy, these writers add. “But between the strategy which fixes, reproduces, multiplies and accentuates existing relations of forces and the class which thereby finds itself in a ruling position, there is a reciprocal relation of production. ... One can say that it is the strategy which allows the ... class ... to exercise its domination. But what I do not think one can say is that the ... class ... invented and forcibly imposed this strategy on the [other] class” (PK: 203). Men for instance, did not impose on women practices like self-starvation or excessive aerobic training in order to make them invisible but patriarchy as a force relation brought about and maintains these practices in a regime that is primarily patriarchal and does not allow women any opportunity to act only for themselves, feminist theorists argue. “The objective existed”, Foucault continues, (the objective to maintain patriarchy, feminist theorists would add) “and the strategy was developed” (the strategy that makes women stay small and invisible in this regime) “with ever-growing coherence, but without it being necessary to attribute it to a subject which makes the law pronouncing it in the form of ‘Though shalt’ and ‘Though shalt not’”. Similarly, the feminist authors whose work is analysed here do not accuse men of having invented these practices but attack them because they are the ruling class in a society that – under the norms of patriarchy – has elevated them to ruling class.

Women know, these authors further tell us, that in men's imaginations they are portrayed as inferior beings or worse as objects. From early on in their lives, women learn to feel that they create fear and repulsion in men because their bodies have the tendency to develop uncontrollably, unlike the bodies of men (Shildrick, and Price, 1999: 3; Bordo, 1990: 103). A potentially rounder, bigger, larger structure of a woman makes her terrifying to her male counterparts. The connotations her size and shape raise are often that she is an insatiable, lusty, promiscuous and thus threatening being, an individual fallen from grace, prone to greed and sin, exactly like her ancestor – Eve (to use Michie's analogy, 1987: 17-8). Her body/she as a person erupts and challenges the existing world order (a patriarchal order) (Bordo: 1990: 103; Reda and Sacco, 2001: 38; Cogan and Ennsberger, 1999: 196). Hence, she produces fear for the 'reasonable', 'organised', 'orderly' Male and turbulence and chaos in his world (Michie, 1987: 21, 28).

Given these historically and culturally grounded perceptions in our western societies, it is not surprising that women constantly feel the need to regulate their bodies, while attempting at the same time to transform these perceptions (MacSween, 1993: 5). This need appears ever more compelling, particularly at times when women conquer some of the traditionally male fortresses in the public arena.

Women's aims for thinness and their preference for dieting and certain modes of training that are believed to guarantee the acquisition and maintenance of a slender body, which is considered as 'perfect' by social (and predominantly male, according to these accounts) standards (Counihan, 1999: 12) are at the same time, we are told, ultimately symbolic of women's subjection to power. This is a form of power which is characterised by the alleged absence of any other disciplinarians apart from women themselves. It is supposedly anonymous and hardly identifiable, much like the power the inmates of the panoptical institution in DP exercise upon themselves. Women control their acts and their bodies on their own. However, many feminist writers say that this power is male (Bartky, 1988: 74, 80) and criticise Foucault for not specifically pointing that out.

My argument is not to deny the idea of patriarchy overall but to illustrate that these feminist authors whose work I discuss might have cast too much of their attention on this notion of patriarchal power and might have been ignoring other

forces that may lead people to treat their bodies in certain ways. Furthermore, my aim is to show that these accounts may not be as balanced themselves, since they are ignoring the embodied experiences of the other half of the population – of men – and fail to see Foucault's point about the ubiquity of power – affecting men and women alike.

A theorising like the one I provide with this thesis may come to put under question the notion of patriarchy and of who exercises power within society, as viewed by feminist writers. Yet, it stays closer to the work of Foucault in that it shows how we are all affected by power.

Let me now look at how, according to these writers, women internalise the norms of femininity as these have been briefly described above. It seems that in our contemporary, male-dominated societies, a low weight and the control of the impulses of the flesh overall, but especially of 'greed', are symbols of status that every woman wants to attain (Bordo, 1990: 101). Additionally, in societies oriented towards the visual media (Bartky, 1988: 84), where the technology of the gaze proliferates and where we are 'brainwashed' with images, but where we are also aware of the fact that we are always somehow monitored, it is not hard to achieve any form of control over the body. In fact, it becomes rather necessary to pursue this in order to show our status (Finkelstein, 1997: 162).

Women are particularly affected in their decisions as to how to treat their bodies as they are constantly shown on TV, in magazines, everywhere, what is or should be for them the 'normal' look, the perfect body, the ideal appearance. It is they who are likely to be influenced by these messages and to pursue the ornamentation and treatment of their bodies in various ways actively and much more intensely, because it is to them that most of these messages are addressed. Women are thus forced to like the images shown to them by the press and media and to dislike their own bodies. They come to view their own flesh as deficient (also on the debate, Steiner, 2001: 128). They try to construct their bodies subconsciously in the way that they are being told to, in accordance with what they see (Bordo in Kemp and Squires, 1997: 454). Because of the structure and the value-system of our societies as presented above, women are rarely left with a way out of this situation or a possibility of resistance to these influences (Bartky, 1988: 71).

This, however, seems to constitute an interpretation of resistance dissimilar to that of Foucault. Resistance seems to be in these accounts presented as a force counterattacking power, but one that is also weak and likely to be ineffective. I will attend to this issue later but let me continue with these analyses.

Women's alleged preference for thinness and consequently for modes of training that will enable them to achieve thinness are not only outcomes of media images, feminist authors continue. As I argued earlier in this section, they are primarily outcomes of their shame – not necessarily conscious – and of their fear of being or of becoming too big, of occupying more space than they are allowed to, of being viewed as sources of promiscuity, of threatening the superior-in-image-and-status Male. Exhausting, painful, sweaty and fat-burning aerobic exercise, or the control of food intake and the mastery of the needs of the flesh overall, reflect not only the growing impact of images on women in an era of visual and virtual reality but are primarily disclosing the nature of norms of embodied femininity (Bartky, 1988: 77, 81). Through culture, women internalise and constantly reproduce these norms as they try to achieve what seems to be the sole aim and only source of power for them: to become desirable to the opposite sex. In an era when the norm in gender relations is heterosexuality, the feminist authors whose work is examined here further argue that becoming desirable to the opposite sex comes to be women's only source of power (Bartky, 1988: 72, 78; see, also, on the matter Coward, 1997: 361).

The mastery of the flesh in any of the aforementioned ways is most “tricky”, though, the authors continue. It provides female individuals with a false sense of identity, power and control, as it makes them believe that they construct their bodies small and infantile *according to their own will*. But this is not really the case (Bartky, 1988: 77-8). Any woman who pursues slenderness comes to believe, we are told, that this is what men expect and like her to look like. She works to construct her body accordingly. But what the obsessed-with-thinness person or, by analogy, the individual obsessed with the taming of the body in the gym fails to understand, the authors insist, is that the subjection of herself to this discipline only implies, presupposes, forces obedience to and reproduces the norms of patriarchy (Bartky, 1988: 81; Michie, 1987: 22; Johnston, 1996: 328).

[A]n exercise discourse such as aerobics can be a means through which women are persuaded to manipulate their bodies for the expression of patriarchal values (Cole, 1993). That is, to some extent, the exercise class is viewed by these women as a tool for achieving the acceptable slender, toned 'look' which we term the 'body beautiful'. Obtaining this look is a fundamental part of these women's gendered identities. Achieving the body beautiful is inextricably interconnected with the construction, development and maintenance of a feminine identity. These women have an intense desire to look feminine and they embody Western ideals of femininity which they encounter in and through aerobics and their wider lived experiences (Mansfield and Maguire, 1999: 83).

Women become thus "the effect[s] of a subjection much more profound than [themselves]" to power, as Bartky says (1988: 78). They become the products of their own self-policing techniques.

Similar claims are made by a number of other writers who discuss the numerous ornamentation and body shaping practices used by women, such as the vast consumption of beauty products or the often painful procedures of cosmetic surgery or liposuction for the acquisition of the perfect body (see, also, Wolf, 1991) – a perfect body that cannot be 'useful' otherwise, weak as it is in its thinness, apart from for reproducing patriarchy.

Authors often express their disappointment with the fact that women have not learnt to read the cultural messages that are inscribed upon their bodies. They complain about the fact that women do not see that such practices only reproduce patriarchy. They feel sorry for women's inability to understand that they are actually the victims of a cruel regime that operates against them (Bartky, 1988: 83; contra, Davis, 1995: 49, 52, 57³⁶).

³⁶ Yet, Davis (2002) says in interpreting her earlier work that her central argument when she wrote *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995) "was that cosmetic surgery cannot be understood as a matter of individual choice; nor is it an artifact of consumer culture which, in principle affects us all". She adds that "[o]n the contrary cosmetic surgery has to be situated in the context of how gender/power is exercised in late modern western culture. Cosmetic surgery belongs to a broad regime of technologies, practices and discourses, which define the female body as deficient and in need of constant transformation" (2002: 49). But Davis has not always shared the views of Bordo, Bartky or others. Her latest work is rather more of an attempt to reset for us the scene in which her earlier writings appeared. What Davis has attempted to do with *Reshaping the Female Body* is how women want to feel 'at home', comfortable, with their bodies (1995: 88) and therefore proceed to cosmetic surgery – although this is something they would probably resort to in only extreme circumstances. Women, however, were not presented by Davis as the passive victims of a patriarchal regime, as often portrayed by other feminist writers (Davis, 1995: 65-6; also, Negrin, 2002: 21). They were instead pictured as actively negotiating their identities and constantly living (with) their bodies, "actively engaging with [such a

Some may admittedly identify that possible ways out of such pathologies may be found in the appreciation of women's indulgences, in the understanding of the necessity for them to pursue pleasure and avoid pain and compulsion equally as much as their male counterparts, in the tolerance of their choices by their comrades in this battle – that is, the other women (Wolf, 1991: 196; Dimen, 1992: 49). But they conclude that the way to go is so long that it seems almost impossible for the members of the female population to resist the already existing patriarchal structure of our societies (Bartky, 1988: 83; Wolf, 1991: 12; contra, see Davis, 1997: 16 and further references there).

While many authors stop their analyses at this point, other writers choose to treat analogous women's practices as acts of resistance against the patriarchal values of our worlds (making thus a more thorough and elaborate use of Foucault's writings), albeit once again only destructive and harmful for women themselves. In a Foucauldian style, these other scholars argue that often women's "resistance is embodied in a literature of "death speeches"", to borrow a phrase from Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982: 146). For them, phenomena like the obsession with thinness or the reshaping of the body through cosmetic surgery or participation in aerobic training present themselves as the result of multiple functioning social "axes", as the effects of various social norms and practices, targeted at and effectively written directly upon the body (Bordo: 1988: 90; 1997: 452). They stay close to Foucault in that they speak not only about patriarchy as a force relation that leads women to disciplining themselves but about numerous other forces (thus pointing to the multifaceted character of power), like the Greco-Christian traditions of asceticism, spirituality and the denial of pleasure (also, Mansfield and Maguire, 1999: 84-5; Smith 2002: 202-3), or people's need to control their bodies as they feel there is nothing else that they

practice], knowledgeable of its drawbacks as well as its benefits" (Negrin, 2002: 21). Davis' work of 1995, although not without problems (according to some she does not address the causes of women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and does not clearly portray women as resisting the dominant ideologies about beauty – Negrin, 2002: 25, 27), is what we could call an example of truly embodied sociology, as it deals with women's ontology and with how they treat and experience their bodies and with how their attitudes change because of the change of their bodies. The example has been taken further by Morgan (1991) and Balsamo (1996), who have actually managed to demonstrate how "cosmetic surgery could be employed as to emphasise the artificiality of beauty and to disrupt the present cultural coding of the female body as 'natural'" (Negrin: 30). These authors show more clearly how the body is a material moulded with culture but also highlight the diversities of this culture and show, consequently, that the notion of beauty is a not fixed one. This interpretation is going to be of use and importance in this study, too (see, also, Chapter 5).

control in the demanding societies where we live. But, for these authors too, it is the “maintenance of power relations between the sexes” (Bordo: 1988: 91; 1990: 85) that practices like the mastery of the flesh through starvation or cosmetic surgery or exercise reinforce. They tell us:

Viewed historically, the discipline and normalisation of the female body – perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class and sexual orientation – has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control (Bordo, 1989: 14).

They do not seem to favour the idea that the manipulation of the female body is part of a conspiracy against women like other writers do, e.g. Wolf (1991: 7). They follow more clearly Foucault’s thesis that each one of us exercises power upon oneself. But they still refer to these women as “victims” of power that advance and extend the situation themselves (Bordo, 1989: 107; 1999: 253) and seem to miss Foucault’s actual point on resistance to power. Again, then, they use the example of anorexia (or rather, of self-starvation) or of aerobic training as specific manifestations of the obsession with slenderness, to attack the seemingly ruling gender-class, men. Men are again those who, in these writers’ work, seem to be set indisputably, universally and across time at the top of gender hierarchy.

Although then, they seem to agree with Foucault that power is held by no one, and that ‘people and groups are positioned differently’ within the nexuses of power, they somehow end up implying again that the only people who have a subordinate position in society are women. Inevitably, they reach the same sad conclusion that many others reach; that any attempt of resistance by women only manages to reproduce the existing gender hierarchy (Bordo, 1989: 15, 21).

In this context of talking about resistance, many authors emphasise again the importance of the gaze in this process of disciplining of the female body (Bordo, 1989: 100; also Bordo in Kemp and Squires, 1997: 454). And although they acknowledge the influences of the media, they see them (correctly) as neither the sole nor the most important disciplinarians (Bordo, 1989: 101; also, Bartky, 1988: 75). It is true after all that the media often only reproduce what people expect to

see³⁷. The truth is, these writers continue, that women obsessed with slenderness are not simply following the images of femininity as they may be presented to them through the TV or magazines. Women are certainly affected by these visual technologies but their attitudes and life stories point to the fact that they also want to resist them. The sufferers of cultural diseases like anorexia want to show that they have the willpower (a male-identified feature)³⁸ to master their flesh. But any recourse to food marks for the anorexic woman the awakening of her desires and counts as a defeat in the battle against the “body”, in the fight to prove “spirituality” (Bordo, 1992: 19; 1997: 452-3; also, Goodlin, 2003: 46). The side of ‘her’ which is associated with strength of will protests. The “male dictator” in her mind, forces a woman to starvation, not only out of fear that she will otherwise be unwanted by any man, but also out of fear in her imagination³⁹ that she will remain powerless (Bordo, 1988: 101, 106-7; also, 1990: 101). Thus, the Male as identified with power and the Male as ultimate judge once again win. Women’s cries are condemned to remain unheard, as they surrender to the classical dualism, male = mind, female = body.

One can find similar claims on women’s attempts to look powerful in a number of other accounts, such as those on female body-builders or female boxers⁴⁰ or women who pursue sporting activities that are traditionally seen as more manly⁴¹. Discussion in these writings usually focuses on the ways in which women choose to ‘build’ their bodies big or strong but also on their attempts to retain their femininity (see, Coles, 1999: 446; Hargreaves, 2000: 132; Birrell and Theberge, 1994). The majority of authors who have studied women in this context conclude that the fact

³⁷ This is a defence that their representatives often put forward, when called to face allegations addressed to them by medical professionals (see, Rumbelow H., ‘Media Blamed for Rise in Girls’ Eating Disorders’ in *The Times*, 31 May 2000).

³⁸ See Bordo, 1990: 86 and Counihan, 1999: 103, on how willpower is associated throughout history with the male and how the mastery of the body has become, in modern times, a symbol of social power.

³⁹ We have here the appropriation of another Foucauldian argument that the soul is, or becomes, the prison of the body (DP: 30). Women subject their bodies to discipline because they are possessed by the idea that if they do nothing for their bodies they will not be liked by others. They are constantly concerned about their appearances. Their concerns govern their bodies and direct them to starving or exercising rigorously.

⁴⁰ See also how attitudes have begun to change in Wood G., ‘Just Give Her a Ring’ in *The Observer Sunday Magazine*, January 2001.

⁴¹ See the work of Messner and Sabo, 1990: 2; Kidd, 1990: 37; Crosset, 1990: 48, 53; Majors, 1990: 109; Bryson, 1990: 175, 178 on how sport is seen as a set of activities mostly associated with masculinity – particularly with white, middle- and upper-class masculinity, but also with rationality,

that women achieve the 'impressive' body is something that 'distresses' the existing sexual order (Coles, 1999: 447; also, Kuhn, 1997: 405), as it allows female individuals to take up much more space than is proper and to be seen as stronger (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993: 63; Bryson, 1990: 179, 182). At the same time, women's attempts to maintain their femininity, in these otherwise masculine domains, by using make-up, letting their hair grow long or even having breast implants and posing as sex-objects prove, ironically, that they still want to be desired by men, that they have to conform with the norms of heterosexuality, that they would do anything to attract men's attention, that they maintain, ultimately, their lower status in the hierarchy of gender (see relevant debate with a variety of arguments discussed in Klein, 1993: 159, 166, 186; Johnston, 1996: 333).

These accounts on body-building presented so far in their majority debate women's subjection to male power and much of the discussion stops there. In other writings, however, we find more concrete acknowledgements that what women who body-build try to do, is protest against and resist all "archetypal associations and traits of femininity" (Bordo, 1990: 102; Eckermann, 1997: 167; Klein, 1993: 179, 187). In mastering their flesh this way, not only do they wish to show spirituality⁴² and transgress the association with the body (unsuccessfully, on most occasions) but, according to some, women also seem to be attempting to resist beauty itself and the possibility of becoming "sex-objects" by becoming minimal and invisible and thus avoiding the male gaze (Bordo, 1990: 101, 103⁴³). Additionally, they may wish to cast away the reproductive role that society has put upon them and show that they are not to be restricted to the domestic sphere⁴⁴. Whatever they do though and for whatever reason, women end up becoming all the less noticeable by their male counterparts, even if they may not be specifically aiming at this. No matter how hard they may be struggling between feeling empowered and either retaining their feminine beauty or denying it, they fail. And precisely because we live in patriarchal

superiority, morality, strength, power, aggressiveness and success; all personality features connected with masculinity.

⁴² Grogan and Richards (2003) illustrate how men also want to prove that they have the willpower to control their bodies, too.

⁴³ Klein argues that women in bodybuilding are not necessarily trying to repudiate "the traditional notion that it is desirable for women to be objectified. There is no repudiation of wanting to be desirable for men: posing is a "turn-on" (1993: 190).

⁴⁴ See, also, McVeigh, T. 'Pre-Teen Girls are Slaves to a Thin Image' in *The Observer*, 28 May 2000.

and heterosexual societies, women's failures to attract the attention of men appear all the more problematic. Whatever interpretation one might follow, the women that many of the writers presented here speak of may only be seen as eventually deconstructing themselves and suffering in silence, as they never manage to reach the standards of some peculiarly 'ideal' female physicality (Bordo, 1989: 22; Coles, 1999: 450).

The majority of the essays discussed up to now have been used as they make explicit references to the Foucauldian writings and to particular Foucauldian themes. Those that do not do so directly, however, also touch on many topics that one can find in Foucault's work as well. These are the mechanics of power, the technology of the gaze and the subjection of bodies and selves to discipline and resistance. All these essays reveal the wide range of purposes and causes that the French philosopher's work has allowed various theorists to speak for. But they have also been given attention because they include and summarise the main points of some of the critiques often levelled against Foucault.

As I have already demonstrated, a number of these authors accuse Foucault of not making special references to gender and gender power relations in his work (also, Gatens, 1999: 229). They also accuse him of speaking of forms of discipline *bound* in character, in the sense that they are connected to certain state institutions, for instance the prison or the hospital⁴⁵ (Bartky, 1988: 75; Bartkowski, 1988: 45, 47). By contrast, many of these authors claim that, in their own analyses, the notions of subordination, subjection and control are unbound – unbound from state-institutions. However, they seem to ignore the fact that Foucault was primarily interested in presenting a view about the functioning of power and the interplay of power-relations *in general* (Howe: 1994: 196; Garland, 1990: 162, 169). Power is not possessed by anyone in particular (not by institutions, only, either), is unlimited and is inherently resistant. In this part, we have noticed however that the theorists I have referred to often fight against a specific type of power, against male power. They view power as bound to a certain institution, namely to patriarchy. But the placement

⁴⁵ And further identified with masculine authority. (On the identification of state institutions with masculinity, see Sumner, 1993: 34; Connell, 1993: 602).

of the idea of patriarchy at the beginning of these feminist analyses sets limits to our understanding of the modes of functioning of power in a Foucauldian manner – as it seems to deny power's diversity, and accordingly justifies the pessimism that often overruns many of these theses on the future of gender relations (see Morgan and Scott, 1993: 11).

Moreover, as I have shown, in these accounts the bodies of women are presented quite indisputably from the start as deficient things, of lower status. The flesh is something that all female individuals should be ashamed of, something that, even in modern times⁴⁶, is viewed and judged by the “ultimate connoisseur” – the Male – as inferior (Bartky, 1988: 73; also, Counihan, 1999: 125). By talking about women's bodies and attitudes overall in such a way, the authors of these accounts reproduce unquestionably the idea of female passivity (see, critical comments in Barrett, 1988: 47; Lupton, 1996: 14; Black and Sharman, 2001: 100) and give the impression that one certain irresistible type of power exists that works only for the benefit of one category of people – men. They fail to discuss the influences of other ideologies and structures – such as class, ethnicity, age – on appearance, image and the shaping of the body overall (Barrett, 1988: 61; Davis, 1995: 50-1). As I have shown, some of the proponents of these views even go as far as denying the impact of all these other ideologies and structures and focus on gender as the only fixed social condition (Riley, 1988: 106)⁴⁷. Ultimately, many of them portray women as

⁴⁶ Or rather, particularly in modern times. In times when women seem to be freer to occupy much more public space, there have been techniques employed, which unconsciously minimise the possibility of their becoming visible.

⁴⁷ This is particularly limiting when it comes to analysing habits or practices related to food intake, as a lot of other distinctions beyond gender are maintained or become manifest through rules about eating, differential control over and access to food (see, also, Counihan, 1999: 8-9). Counihan makes this point in her study and shows how in cultures other than the north-American, women and men “are allowed greater latitude in body morphology and an easier path to self-satisfaction through the body” (1999: 11; also 1999: 61). She demonstrates also how the “power of women has often derived from the power of food” (1999: 46). Other feminist theorists may not deny this but we have seen the negative interpretations about women's status that they are led to by associating women with insatiability and greed (Counihan, 1999: 77, 81). Counihan however seems to be talking about a form of power of women by arguing that they are those who often have and exercise significant control over the family table (1999: 49). Further on the association of food with sexuality and the values of power see Probyn, 1999: 215, 217. Probyn argues that “food ... returns our attention to the forces that regulate our everyday lives: in short to a very practical figuring of an everyday ethics of living” (1999: 224). In a rather late-Foucauldian manner she shows how: “thinking *through* food to sex may make us ‘infinitely more susceptible to pleasure’. Pleasure and ethics, sex and food are all about breaking up the strict moralities which constrain us” (1999: 226).

cultural dupes, unable to understand or fight against the imperatives of our culture and (re)gain control over their lives (relevant critique in Davis, 1995: 57, 65).

Additionally, these accounts further reproduce the paradox that feminist writers are using “patriarchal language to destroy patriarchy” (Michie, 1987: 130). They reproduce, in other words, the binary mind/body division in a way that seems to deny women any connection with ‘the mind’. They *re-gender* the debate about the body. What Foucault himself considered as the real strength of the women’s movement, the fact that many feminist authors had already in his time “departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality” (PK: 219)⁴⁸, seems to be introduced again into feminist thought. By re-identifying women only with the flesh and by viewing women’s pathologies as imprints and representations of an already existing male dominated culture that is always meant to make the female members of the population suffer, they portray women as helpless, hopeless, mindless individuals that only feel the constant need to improve their bodies. They deny them any opportunity to think at all to resist this culture (Budgeon, 2003: 39, 41). Obviously, this contradicts Foucault’s contention that power does not belong to anyone specifically and is not static and exists in all kinds of social relations and enables people to resist it in various ways:

Power ... is to be located in th[e] moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable This means ..., that in all these localised areas of power relations there is always resistance against domination (Burkitt, 1998: 495)

A further problem with the theses presented above is that they ignore women’s powers in other fields of life which are effects of the fact that women also often dissociate themselves from their materiality, their corporeality, and in doing so manage to resist certain cultural imperatives about their bodies. A number of studies

⁴⁸ Foucault argues that “[t]he real strength of the women’s liberation movement is not that of having laid claim to the specificity of their sexuality and the rights pertaining to it, but that they have actually departed from the discourse conducted within the apparatuses of sexuality ... [The outcome was] ultimately, a veritable movement of de-sexualisation, a displacement effected in relation to the sexual centering of the problem, formulating the demand for forms of culture, discourse, language and so on, which are no longer part of that rigid assignation and pinning-down to their sex which they had initially in some sense been politically obliged to accept in order to make themselves heard.” (PK: 219-20)

of women in many professional, managerial and administrative posts, for example, demonstrate how women overcome the association with the flesh (by dressing in 'neutral' suits, for instance, or by strategically building their careers) and can feel and be indeed successful and 'powerful' in these domains (Brewis, 2000: 175, 181).

Other accounts show that women do not necessarily have to dissociate themselves from their materiality in order to feel empowered. On the contrary, these writings show that women may feel so precisely because they can show (off) their bodies, no matter if their bodies are perfect or not. Jacobs-Brumberg illustrates in her work how her students, for instance, "regarded the ability to display their bodies [at the beach, during the summer, in their "newest, most minimal bikinis"] as a sign of women's liberation, a mark of progress and a basic American right" (1997), as something that women had achieved in their struggles to end male oppression, as a sign of their own power.

In *Throwing Like a Girl*, Young (1990), demonstrates how women can find pleasure in fashion and feel powerful in the variety of identities they are called to take up, every time they are dressing themselves with the latest haute couture creation (1990: 185).

A useful example of the employment of a number of techniques through which women may resist or neutralise the rules and practices that are said to aim at their oppression may also be found in Budgeon (2003). The author shows how her female interviewees often manage to overcome unease about their appearances by revising, reconsidering what actually constitutes a norm of appearance⁴⁹. Only very few people are as 'skinny' and 'well-dressed' as the models in the magazines, the girls in her study said, and "[t]here's no point in changing to be like them because nobody is like them apart from in the media. It's not really reality" (2003: 44). For these girls, Budgeon shows:

[t]he discomfort produced by the desire for what they did not have was dissolved by placing all women within this position. Indeed, having a problem with the way one looks was interpreted as quite a 'normal' relationship, so, rather than feeling as though one's body was abnormal and in need of transformation, it was *that very feeling* which was normalised. Through this manoeuvre their accounts of what actually constituted normality undermined

⁴⁹ This is something that my interviews will also confirm. See Chapters 5 and 6.

what cultural influences dictated as 'normal' thereby counteracting the homogenising capacity of these representations (2003: 44). [Emphasis in the original].⁵⁰

Budgeon does not make direct references to Foucault in her essay. Yet her work is used here as it emphasises precisely the necessity to understand the multiple ways in which the body is lived and the ways in which people get to appreciate, negotiate, re-evaluate, permanently reconsider their experiences and their corporeality within the context of power relations and how they eventually manage to resist these relations (Budgeon, 2003: 46). She reminds us further of Foucault when she discusses the relationship between knowledge, the self and the body. She employs the same notions and words and seems to be prompting us to identify how resistance to power may be built on the basis of letting ourselves (our bodies) to be caught up in the nexuses of it. She seems to argue like Foucault that by acquiring knowledge about what our bodies can do, we can understand ourselves:

The self/body configuration is one which is lived via its immersion in a multiplicity of sites, knowledges and processes, therefore, understanding the choices [people] make in 'doing' embodied identity requires a move beyond reductionist accounts, away from questions about what [people's] bodies mean to questions about what [people's] bodies can do (Budgeon, 2003: 52).

Contrary to these latter views, the previously presented theses on women's powerlessness further reproduce what seems to be the sole "feminine ideal that still haunts us [all; that] of Barbie-doll, artificial beauty" (Chanter, 1999: 372). In doing so, though, these former views are "reinventing or replicating the power dynamics we seek to avoid" (Chanter, 1999: 372), and fail, therefore, to identify the great variety of relations (not only beyond patriarchy but also those beyond beauty as a

⁵⁰ This is a viewpoint that may also help explain, as I will show in Chapter 6, why people may refrain from engaging in certain body shaping practices on the whole. It certainly helps justify the behaviour of the many outsiders to the gym culture. However, this is not to imply that the people who go to the gym are completely unable to acknowledge or negotiate and ultimately resist the cultural imperatives that take them there. What I do is demonstrate precisely this. I show that even when partaking in activities that seem to entrap them in the pursuit of certain ideals, people are actually able to reconsider these norms constantly, all the more so because they get to know quite well how the system functions from within. This is Foucault's argument, too.

strategy serving patriarchy) that have an impact on the choices of women to treat their bodies in certain ways.

The continuation of this “women’s victimisation” and “impotence” attitude has often been considered by many (and definitely by supporters and sympathisers of Foucault) as a rather dangerous project for feminism. Now that the movement’s aims have changed from attacking patriarchy to investigating subjectivity under the influence of post-modern thought, the employment of Foucault’s ideas on the panoptical gaze and the subjection of bodies (as entities) and selves to the mechanics of power could prove even more useful and be extended to cover the multiple experiences of embodiment of many more individuals or groups of people (Kemp and Squires, 1997: 7; Nicholson, 1990: 4). The employment of these ideas would more fully reveal the multiplicity and fluidity of power relations and the different effects of their exercise upon the body and on our selves (Martin, 1988: 11, 16; Morris, 1988: 33; Battersby, 1999: 357).

And a number of theorists have rightly argued that we should also pay attention to Foucault’s later claims on the variety of forms of resistance to power and the use of a multiplicity of pleasures in the construction of individuals able to achieve freedom (Hollibauch, 1996: 229; Chanter, 1999: 373; Bell, 1993: 32). At a practical level this means that we should pay attention to how all people, and of course how women, negotiate our existence and identities when getting involved in various body shaping practices (Davis, 1995: 49, 108, 113). Moreover, we also need to look at how we enjoy our bodies, how we come to feel satisfied or happy about them, in spite of the fact that we may not be anything like the models portrayed in the media (Davis, 1995: 80, 103). And most of all, we should pay attention to the ways in which all of us debate or interpret the various cultural norms that exercise their disciplinary capacities on our bodies in ways that enable us, ultimately, to undermine and reformulate or transgress these norms.

Foucault’s ‘theory’, in my view, not only assures us that it is possible to imagine something like this but shows in what sense it is actually possible to ‘achieve’, or rather to understand a type of behaviour, as resistance. And although Foucault has not shown us in detail what people’s bodies can do but has talked rather abstractly about bodies (see section 1.1.4.), others find that he has actually helped us

understand exactly what Budgeon also emphasises in her closing sentence, that there are indeed many things that are done, many knowledges that are produced, many resistances that may be achieved, and many experiences that are lived, through our bodies (Budgeon, 2003: 52). Given this, it is indeed surprising how little light has been cast on Foucault's later work where he develops these ideas, and it is fortunate that it was eventually acknowledged that his theses extend widely and may match the aims of many theorists and support their debates in many respects. As Sawicki informs us, the radicalism of Foucault's analysis lies precisely in that:

it introduces ... new questions and problems concerning prevailing ways of understanding ourselves which continue to dominate our thinking about radical social transformation (1991: 176).

Feminism is a field of knowledge that should take advantage of this and, fortunately, has begun to do so recently. Concentrating on the study of power as productive and on the possibilities for liberation from its mechanics through practices of the self, through introspection, through self-reflection – namely, on Foucault's later work – would be extremely beneficial. It would help women understand their own power. As Bell suggests:

a Foucauldian/feminist perspective retains an awareness of contradictions within ... 'domination' as well as an optimism, because if power is exercised not possessed, contingent rather than static, feminist opposition to the various forms of power may expect to identify more gaps and weaknesses in power's operations (1993: 41).

The work of Foucault could thus prove to be as good an ally for feminism as post-modern theorising has.

3.3. Power, the Body and the Transgression of the 'Male Power' Debate

As one should not dismiss the idea of patriarchy overall (Martin, 1988: 16), one should also not deny the importance of the feminist movement in our understanding of certain forms of oppression or in the opening of our eyes to the

myriad ways power operates (Young, 1988: 183). However, a fuller analysis would need to show what other forces, apart from patriarchy, might be at play, informing people's choices to engage in certain body-shaping practices. These may hide behind or may be reflected in the variety of ideals, purposes, aims and reasons why people engage in practices such as attending a gym or having a cosmetic surgery and so on.

These other forces become apparent in a number of other writings, although in many instances their authors do not necessarily present them as 'power relations' in a Foucauldian sense (Gimlin, 2002; Sassatelli, 2000). In fact, these writers do not always draw directly from the work of Foucault but still discuss a number of issues that one could connect to his projects. They seem to integrate more effectively into their accounts the idea of the operation of patriarchal power, the influences of bourgeois culture, the work ethic and notions of satisfaction and personal achievement, the role of the media, the fashion industry and the role of beauty experts but also the influence of health practitioners and others on people's (men's and women's) decisions to exercise, buy certain body-care products, and generally treat their flesh in certain manners (also, Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 216).

These analysts emphasise that it is rather limiting to argue that in an era of technological and scientific evolution, of massive production of goods, in an era of speed and images, in a period of consumerism, in the demanding societies where we live, all these things can only result in the control and subjection of women. It is highly doubtful whether we can talk of the mass media and other industries being governed solely by "male ideology", as a number of feminist theorists imply. It is questionable if such an ideology is dominant at all. It would be more plausible for us to acknowledge that we are all, men and women, subject to a number of different social forces that direct our behaviours. It would be more plausible if we tried to identify these forces and make sense of the reasons for their appearance and of the modes of their operation but also of their positive effects (Segal, 1999: 107).

Most of the accounts presented so far in this chapter consider men as dominators of our society, as "possessors" of all power, in spite of the fact that many of the proponents of such theses ironically acknowledge the limits of such theorising (Bordo, 1999: 252). In their fight against men, many of these authors seem to have created equally totalising and partial theories (as they accuse Foucault of having

done). Their interpretations fail to show that networks of power are as inescapable for men as they are for women, and that men too make serious efforts to construct their bodies in particular ways, which may be leading them to becoming nothing like the strong, excessively bulgy or muscular, clearly visible individuals that the previously referred to feminist authors have in mind (Cain, 1989: 4, 11; Sumner, 1993: 31, 33; Hearn & Collinson, 1994: 97; Connell, 1993: 602; Grogan and Richards: 225, 229). Perspectives like those addressed in the previous section, although proving the correctness of Foucault's argument on the expansion of the carceral network throughout society⁵¹, do not allow us to realise that the grounds for the genesis of the cultural pathologies they describe may not solely lie in the notion of patriarchal power, as a form of power that works to oppress or objectify women only (see, also, McElroy, 1997)⁵².

The fuller analysis that I propose, then, would have to include also those theses which indicate how men are caught up in power relations and try to find out exactly which relations these are. The recent developments in the field of men's studies provide useful insights into this issue and fill in the part of the picture that we are missing. I will turn therefore to these theses now.

It is only lately that the focus of social enquiry has shifted to the lives of men and to their embodied experiences and perceptions of their bodies (Morgan, 1993: 67; Grogan and Richards, 2002: 219). It is only in the last decade that a number of studies have attempted to break the male population's "over-phallusized picture", the discourse about men's aggression but also their association with spirituality and reason (Morgan, 1993: 68). It is only lately that attention has focused on the insecurities, worries, concerns or even possibly the shame many members of the male population feel about their appearance. One BBC programme in 2001 made extensive reference to the fact that "Body Image Problems Hit Men Too"⁵³. "Magazines Blamed for Male Eating Disorders" one also read in *The Scotsman*,

⁵¹ And women's stories manage to fit quite well, it seems, with the latest penal regime described in his book.

⁵² See, for example, Sciltz, T. *Men and Eating Disorders: The Latest Facts* in <<http://www.edap.org/men.html>>, (2000) and 'Male Anorexics "Ignored"' in *The Guardian*, August 18, 1999, on the complaints of male anorexics.

⁵³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/health/newsid_1632000/1632112.stm> (2001). Also, Flockhart, S. 'The Big Issue' in *The Sunday Herald*, 15 September 2002.

around the same time⁵⁴. It is only in the last few years that sociological and popular discussion has opened up and focused more closely on the ‘new man’, the caring father, the sensitive partner who is sharing the housework as well as the male homosexual or the male individual who buys beauty products for his body, crèmes, hair gels, etc; the one who looks after himself and his appearance and strives for the perfection of his bodily shape like his female counterpart (see, Barthel, 1992: 140-1; also Morgan, 1993: 85; Davis, 1995: 49; Davis, 2002, 50; Jevons, 1999: 85; Counihan, 1999: 91). There must be a number of things that this ‘feminisation of culture’, as Barthel calls it (1992: 148) – that is, the expansion of the feminine practice of consuming products for their ornamentation and personal care to the realm of the Male – has to tell us about our cultures and about the operation of force relations in our societies as well as about the position or “authority of men” (Connell, 1997: 109) in them.

It is surprising that this consideration of men, and specifically their consideration as a deeply embodied species has taken so long to occur, particularly since it has often been their physicality that has opened the way to, formed the basis, and facilitated the development of the early feminist discourse that viewed men as the oppressors of women, or other debates in the field of sport, or discussions about the state and state power as ‘male’ identified and so on (see, also, Morgan, 1993: 69). It is additionally surprising that this has taken so long to occur since, as many writers would be ready to show us with different examples, men have historically had as great an aspiration for the beauty and decoration of their bodies as women (Davis, 1995: 40)⁵⁵. Grogan and Richards (2002: 229-30) demonstrate that men are also put

⁵⁴ *The Scotsman*, 6 March 2001. “Images of perfect male bodies in men’s magazines like *FHM* and *Loaded* may have contributed to the rise of eating disorders in males” is claimed in the article. “Boys who are teased by their peer group ... because they are overweight or do not conform to the image of a perfect body”, the spokesman for Eating Disorders Association said, “might think they could avoid bullying if they looked like the man in the magazines”. He continued that men were less likely to starve by cutting down substantially on food but were more likely to over-exercise for the purpose. The point to be made here is that men can, like women, be subjected to certain forces and thus come to treat their bodies in certain ways.

⁵⁵ In her work of 2002, Davis shows how “the assumption seems to be that ‘normal’ men do not care about their appearance and if they do, there must be something wrong with them” (2002: 56). Davis attempts to explain with this argument why a practice like cosmetic surgery, despite the rise in the numbers of men that resort to it (2002: 50), is not in the near future at least going to affect the male population to an equal extent as it affects the female. She tells us that the latter is unlikely to happen in our heterosexual societies because “cosmetic surgery [can never be expected to] ‘enhance’ masculinity for men in the same way it ‘enhances’ femininity for women” (2002: 59). One may agree, of course, with Davis that cosmetic surgery for men may take a long time to become acceptable.

under pressure to construct their bodies in particular shapes as they want to be accepted. And the reasons for doing so are often, as in the case of women, related more to aesthetics than to health or the functionality of the body.

In any case, it has been extremely useful that this shift of focus towards men has taken place. Surely, it helps illuminate the ways of men's subjection to power and to a variety of disciplinary mechanisms and regimes; it also helps us understand the plural forms of male embodiment (Morgan, 1993: 77-8).

It is interesting that even feminism with/in its new face/phase has tried to cast light on such issues (see, relevant acknowledgment in Dutton, 1995: 4). It was a very interesting moment, for example, when in 2000, as profound a feminist scholar as Susan Bordo published a book that aspired to investigate precisely the men's subjection to a number of 'new' (for them) imperatives which demanded that they constructed their flesh to be toned but not overtly muscular, youthful and, ultimately, beautiful. One must add that although this was not the first time Bordo had dealt with such a topic (Bordo, 1999: 252), it was nonetheless the most significant. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* is a book about the anxieties of the male members of the population who had been so far ignored by the relevant literature. It deals with the construction of their bodies compliant to the aforementioned norms. The author looks at men's sufferings, their pathologies and their attempts of resistance to these bodily, disciplinary regimes (2000: 215-9, 285). She addresses most of these issues in the chapter titled "Beauty (Re)Discovers the Male Body". Bordo, though, surprisingly, attributes more of men's problems to the ethos of 'consumer capitalism' (which offers a variety of products for the care and ornamentation of the male body too) than to any changes in the gender order. This is an interpretation that she has rarely in her previous writings applied to women (2000: 169-225; especially, though, pp. 220-5)⁵⁶.

For all her good intentions to deal with the ignored men though, Bordo quickly glosses over a number of other factors like class and race and their impact on

However, this should not be seen as leaving men totally unaffected by the operation of the forces of power and subjecting only women to the pursuit of ideals such as beauty. On the contrary, men can be seen as equally influenced by these forces, albeit in different ways, and Davis adamantly shows this, since she seems to deny the possibility of men feeling *as empowered* by such a practice as her female interviewees have and, implicitly, points to men's need to feel good about their image.

⁵⁶ Analogously, Sumner, 1993: 26, 36.

the formation of perceptions about the male body. These issues, although mentioned, are rarely discussed in this context (2000: 250-1). And, ironically, in a project that claims to be about men, her comments on these matters only remind us again of the alleged inferior group in the gender hierarchy, the ‘suffering’ women (mainly white, middle-class, American women), who, as she argues, always fall victim to the gaze of men – of all men of every class, colour, personality and body type – and whose subordinate status seems to have remained unaltered in spite of all other social transformations. (One can find such remarks about women’s inferior status in pp. 174, 193, 216, 296.)

It has taken a few male authors’ accounts, like that of Dutton (1995), to focus our attention more clearly on men and their pursuit of certain standards of bodily structure, and so further our understanding of the modern western ideals of men’s physical development. Dutton is particularly concerned with “the metaphorical and symbolic value that has been attached to highly developed muscularity” (1995: 13). He argues that:

the symbolism of muscularity in western societies has been developed within the context of two principal metaphors: the muscular body as power-symbol and as pleasure-symbol (1995: 16).

As one may recall, Foucault also appeals to these notions of power and pleasure.

Dutton further claims that “power-symbolism and pleasure-symbolism themselves may not be discrete and unequivocal elements of a particular representation or embodiment, but may both be present [in the muscular body] in varying degrees” (1995: 16-17). He reminds us also of Foucault’s ideas of discipline and pleasure when he argues that it is “the combination of an affluent consumer society and the Protestant work ethic [that] has been reflected in activities which paradoxically combine disciplined asceticism on the one hand and narcissistic hedonism on the other” (1995: 17). The outcome of these force relations (advanced capitalism, consumerism, pleasure, work ethic and the sense of achievement in our highly competitive societies) is the construction of the muscular body, he says.

The author speaks, of course, of the ‘power-symbolism’ of the male flesh and in this sense he seems to validate the feminist claims that the Male is historically

associated with power. Dutton, however, does not necessarily wish to agree with this. What he rather wants to show is that men are subjected to a number of disciplinary forces that are not the effects of gender hierarchy only but may work parallel to it and create their own networks, in which the male population is also caught. One of them, the work ethic, is a force relation on its own and, as I also demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6, a very important one for the formation of people's decisions to exercise.

Dutton traces the origins of the western ideal of male physical development back to Greek antiquity. Like Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, he sees in that tradition the ideas of self-mastery and of pleasure. He demonstrates how the two harmoniously co-existed and how their effects became manifest in the structure of the bodies of athletes and semi-gods (1995: 33). He provides an extensive and illuminating analysis of the treatment of the human (mainly, the male) body throughout history. He also takes into consideration the influences of Christianity, but also of the technological advancements of later eras and of various ideologies on the attitudes towards the flesh. His focus is the practice of body-building and he explains how societies have created a culture around it and around the idea of "training for shape" (1995: 90, 97, 108). He examines what the existence of this culture further implies and how it can be justified. The issues of sexuality and gender identity are, of course, also discussed in this work (1995: 145, 147), as is the topic of the "love-objectification" of the male body (1995: 159). Dutton portrays the 'transitory states' (to borrow a phrase from Riley, 1999: 224) that the male body has gone through and shows that nowadays it is not only men who can look at women and judge their appearance. Women also have the right to look back at men in the same way as men looked at them in the past; as love-objects (also, Danaher et al, 2000: 55, Gamman & Marshment, 1988; Gamman, 1988: 20; Moore, 1988: 45). Dutton says that "[t]he traditional distinction – men are 'the sex that looks' whereas women are 'the sex that is looked at' – no longer appears to hold true in liberal western cultures" (1995: 253, 330)⁵⁷. And although he fears that the objectification of the male body will not be enough to stop the "demonology" in much sociological

⁵⁷ The shift in the ways of viewing the male body and the change in attitudes towards masculinity and male identity are also illustrated in Worton, 1997: 18.

discourse about the alleged violation of our morality, associated with the somehow pornographic, visual exploitation of male or female body-builders, what he advises us to keep in mind is that men are now equally 'on display' (1995: 332).

Dutton succeeds in demonstrating that we live in an era that is obsessed with ideals like "youth, health and physical beauty" (1995: 170) and that analogous obsessions are not characteristic of the female population only (also, Moore, 1988: 45). Syndromes such as those of "bodyism" – the "concentration on the outward appearance of the body, as distinct from that control of the inner body which was of more exclusive concern in earlier centuries" (Dutton, 1995: 178) – and "healthism" (the preoccupation with health) – the paradoxical combination of a hedonistic lifestyle with a preoccupation with ascetic practices aimed at the achievement and maintenance of health, fitness and youthfulness (Dutton, 1995: 273) – affect, in some way or another, all individuals regardless of their gender. He notes, when discussing the current preoccupation with thinness, that "men no less than women have fallen victim to the 'beauty myth'" out of the need to conform with the various models presented to them (analogously, Grogan and Richards, 2002: 220-1). He refers to other studies that illustrate the anxieties of men regarding the construction of their bodies according to existing cultural standards (Dutton, 1995: 184-5). Bodybuilders are an extreme example of this, he seems to imply (1995: 191, 196), as are women obsessed with thinness. Dutton acknowledges that the "tyranny of the perfectible body" as manifested in the figures of these bodybuilders is as much a "public issue" (1995: 227) as the pathologies of the feminist population that I mentioned earlier. He points to studies that attribute "men's psycho-sexual anxieties" to the "emergence of women's sexual consciousness" (1995: 229, 346) and to their own needs to "reassure themselves as to their masculine identity" (1995: 235). He further argues that "the motivation to take up some form of physical exercise is often grounded in the desire to make the body more physically attractive" (1995: 240).

Similar views may be found in the account of Klein (1993) on the subculture of bodybuilding. The author shows, too, how bodybuilders subject themselves to the discipline of rigid timetables and of dieting regimes (1993: 31) and how they exercise daily for hours (1993: 41, 260) in order to acquire physiques that are hyperbolically muscular. He attributes the subjection to these regimes to the

insecurity these men feel about their appearance and about the fact that their bodies often may not reflect their masculinity (1993: 4, 218, 242; contra, Monaghan, 1999: 268)⁵⁸. He looks at these men's social relations and their relations with their training partners (1993: 67, 117 onwards) in order to show how isolated from the rest of the world bodybuilders often feel, and to further interpret their expectations, attitudes to life and behaviours towards their bodies (1993: 119, 154; also, Black and Sharman, 2001: 100). In societies that seem to leave them with a huge sense of powerlessness and inability to control other things, Klein argues, men, like women, tend to feel that the mastery of their flesh is the only thing they can actually accomplish (1993: 40). And they work hard to achieve this. From as early on as the introduction the author remarks that "[i]n ... looking in the bodybuilding mirror we see men trying too hard to come across as invulnerable and in command" (1993: 9). (Analogous comments can be found in pp: 191, 242, 271, 280).

What Klein's account, like that of Dutton, succeeds in demonstrating is that men also strive for beauty and that the male body is also nowadays put "on display" (1993: 250). Men are exposed to the public eye and to the gaze of the opposite sex like their female counterparts. The practice of bodybuilding, the author says, is clearly one that exposes men in this way.

3.4. The Treatment of the Flesh beyond Obsession

The pursuit of physical development is not, of course, an obsession for all people; neither does it always take the 'extreme' forms outlined above. There are certainly more moderate ways in which people may choose to treat their bodies. Roberta Sassatelli, in her study of 1999, concentrates on the experiences of regular users of the gym – people who do not appear to be fanatic about the idea of beauty, yet attend certain training programmes and often make use of relevant facilities and programmes. Sassatelli is critical of certain sociological projects that focus on combined analyses of gender and body ideals, because she sees them as having limits and preventing a clear understanding of the formation of people's embodied

⁵⁸ Although such practices and justifications may seem to reproduce the gender order because they lead to male physicality being enhanced and men becoming more 'visible' (see, also, Klein, 1993: 18), they also make quite clear that men fall 'victims' to power mechanisms, too.

experiences (1999: 2.5). She follows a different path of theorising, demonstrating how people's involvement in training makes them continue to attend fitness programmes and go to the gym for reasons that lie "well beyond the objectives which have brought them" there in the first place (1999: 5.1) – namely, the compliance with the aforementioned body/beauty ideals. Rather, Sassatelli seeks to show how the gym as an institution organises people's (trainees') experiences in such a way that allows them to visit the place over and over again, by providing them not only with a feeling that they can reach the broader goals of looking beautiful or keeping fit but also with a feeling that exercise can help them meet their more specific, 'expressive demands'. The gym makes them feel at ease and enjoy the experience of training (1999: 5.1). Music and the facilities that one can use for one's own training purposes are some of the provisions that meet the purpose of the trainees' to enjoy their time in the exercise venue. Sasattelli's work is useful here in that it conveys the pleasurable feelings which her interviewees associate with the process of exercise and helps us realise how these may derive from submitting one's self to a number of disciplinary practices. Sasattelli's work is not based directly on the writings of Foucault although at times she borrows from him and certainly reminds us particularly of his later writings on pleasure; on how discipline becomes pleasure. The responses of her interviewees, as I have said, give valuable hints towards the interpretation of Foucault's later texts. The implication behind Sassatelli's argument seems to be that from the time discipline becomes pleasure for us, one might well say that, as far as that part of our life that we are now able to enjoy is concerned, we have succeeded in making our selves works of art, that we have been empowered and liberated.

In her later writings (2000), however, Sassatelli returns to the issue of social imperatives and cultures and their impact on people's choices to exercise. She describes the 'Keep-fit culture and its values'. She investigates the latest fashion in Italy of people going to the gym, a fashion that – as she tells us – is growing constantly, as an aspect of the broader commercialisation of every aspect of life and more specifically the commercialisation of people's willingness to show their status and establish their identity through paying for their fitness (2000: 399). Thus, although her first conclusion, that within the gym dynamics develop that influence or alter participants' views and attitudes with regard to training, is definitely plausible

and useful, in her later work Sassatelli seems to emphasise the need for us to return to an investigation of the broader social forces and imperatives that inform the behaviours towards our bodies. She argues that a lot of these forces have been to date undertheorised and deserve our attention.

3.5. *The Body beyond the Beauty Myth*

As I have shown, the majority of accounts presented here have either borrowed directly from the work of Michel Foucault on power or have constituted autonomous studies within the field of sociology dealing with the various practices of body shaping. However, these accounts most often concentrate on the discussion, portrayal and explanation of one ideal that is said to constitute people's sole or main aim, when the latter choose to treat their bodies. This is the acquisition of the body beautiful. At least, this appears to be most clearly the case in the first set of essays, which debate more the issues of gender hierarchy, sexuality and the making of oneself more desirable to others but is no less apparent in many of the other projects which have been discussed here (see, also, Davis, 1995: 41)⁵⁹.

In these analyses, both those that deal with the starving female body but also in the vast majority of the studies that are concerned with the human body in the gym (mainly, in those that investigate what happens in weight rooms and aerobics classes), the ideal of appearance and in parallel to it certain notions of aestheticism occupy a central place. The body is presented in most of these writings as subjected to discipline in order to become beautiful, to reach the existing standards of (male or female) attractiveness; an aspiration that in many instances is believed to reach the limits of narcissism (Lasch, 1980: 356). Or, conversely, the body is presented as painfully but bravely transgressing these standards of beauty, which are further related – according to these studies – mainly to size and muscle definition.

But whatever the case, and regardless of whether it is men or women that we are talking about, the work put into the body is almost always seen in the literature as

⁵⁹ Although Davis often also demonstrates the reluctance of the women she has studied to associate their problems with 'beauty' (1995: 88).

primarily aiming at or evolving around the issue of beauty. Wolf's and Gimlin's books by their titles alone constitute characteristic indications of the fact that almost everything about the body is done in the pursuit of and for the sake of aesthetics. A title like that of Wolf's book, *The Beauty Myth* (1991), reconfirms that there are a wide range of practices, techniques and behaviours that are employed by women so that they become beautiful, whereas Gimlin seems to point out in her own study (2002) that a significant amount of *Body Work*, be it in the form of a hairdo in a hair salon or of exercise in an aerobics studio or of cosmetic surgery or of a 'lesson' in appreciation of fat bodies through the activities of a certain organisation (the NAAFA), is associated mainly with (women negotiating their) *Beauty and Self-Image*.

On the other hand, a number of other approaches that have been discussed here seem to constitute a breakthrough to the debate about the body beautiful. The construction of the flesh as such is no longer the sole reason for people's subjection to training or to the huge variety of body shaping practices. Rather body shaping techniques seem to be based on a number of other ideals, such as fitness, health, happiness, achievement, that all seek to fabricate and be re-created by the operation of power and the knowledge it produces about modern social life. Cogan and Ernsberger, for example, show us, in this context, how fatness equals disease rather than being associated with beauty (1999: 191, 194). The authors suggest that:

by shifting to a more comprehensive approach toward health [as far as such issues about diet etc. are concerned] we can prevent new populations once considered immune and another generation of children, women and men from developing eating problems, loathing their bodies, engaging in risky weight loss strategies, and dying to be thin (1999: 202).

Analogous views are echoed in the article of Miller (1999). Here the relation between fitness and health is analysed, and it is shown how exercise can help reduce the risks and ameliorate the symptoms of certain diseases. The dangers for health that are associated with dieting for the sake of thinness and beauty are clearly illustrated, and it is suggested that what should be pursued instead through exercise is health and a healthy weight management (1999: 213-5). Counihan also discusses how in some cultures the health of the body is considered equally as important as beauty and how

thinness is a signifier of an unhealthy body (1999: 187). (One may also find relevant comments in Armstrong, 1994: 25; Sassatelli, 2000: 400; Dutton, 1995; Nettleton, 1992: 149 and 1997: 207, 210; Eckermann, 1997: 162; Davis, 1995: 457, 460; Monaghan, 1999: 286; Klein: 1993: 140).

It may be true, then, that the reasons why people take up physical exercise might have a lot more to do with the desire to make their bodies more beautiful rather than with “the quest for better health or improved fitness” (Dutton, 1995: 240). But it seems to me it is certainly worth exploring these other possibilities as well, which have by and large been overlooked by the academic literature. This might lead us to unravel a lot more information about current power relations, about the way that our societies function and about ourselves. What these ideals exactly entail or how they are understood by the individuals aspiring to them, I shall demonstrate in detail in later chapters. It is my impression that one may find in these ideals the various force relations or threads of power that Foucault speaks about in his work and in their interplay the possibilities of resistance (in the Foucauldian sense) of the modern individual to power. It is through them, through the active and knowledgeable negotiation of these ideals that one can understand how we may construct ourselves ethically.

3.6. Foucault, Gender and the Body: A Summary

What I have tried to do in this chapter was to address a number of accounts that draw on the work of Foucault and illustrate how the body is caught up in the social order and is shaped by cultural demands. The majority of these accounts come from the field of feminist studies. I have criticised many of these accounts on the grounds that they present women mainly as victims of power, they speak of power mostly as patriarchal and they ignore men and the forces that make men shape their bodies in certain ways. They miss then the point of Foucault’s scheme about power and fail to see that his accounts do not only help us understand men’s condition in modern societies but also women’s. I have also criticised them for presenting beauty as the main reason why people engage in various body shaping practices. As I show in Chapters 5 and 6, my empirical work revealed that there are in fact many more

forces at work which make people subject themselves to such regulation. I have used these accounts though, as they allowed me to draw out of them theoretical and empirical insights which will help me in subsequent chapters to refine Foucault's work on the body, as in these texts the body is more clearly visible.

I will now turn to present how my study was empirically organised.

4. *Studying the Body in the Gym: Bridging Theory and Practice*

In the previous chapters, I introduced and attempted to analyse Foucault's work and explained why *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* have been given special attention in my thesis. I further illustrated how these texts have been interpreted by a variety of writers. I also drew on a large number of sociological writings on the body and on particular body shaping practices, in order to show more clearly how the flesh may be caught up in the social order. But I also remarked that, what has existed so far in relevant literature are accounts that illuminate or dismiss aspects of Foucault's work, together with empirical projects on gyms that "concentrate on gender differences and the physical ideals prized within some of the most noticeable - yet not necessarily the most popular - [training] techniques", usually with the aim of exposing "the extent to which participants incorporate oppressive forms of masculinity or femininity". Namely, the focus is "on extreme phenomena" (Sassatelli, 1999: 2.4, 2.5), such as bodybuilding or excessive aerobic training, which are usually employed in gender theory to support claims on the maintenance and re-production of the existing patriarchal social order. I argued that I found these writings partial because they concentrate only on the experiences of half of the population (mainly, the female), because they focus on less usual examples and because they do not always accurately reflect the essence of Foucault's work (that power affects us all; men and women) or the positive value of his writings (the productive aspects of power – the knowledges and the pleasures that emanate from the operation of and our involvement with disciplinary power).

In this chapter, I introduce my empirical project; the study of the gym and of people's experiences of exercise in the gym and their experiences of discipline, power and pleasure; the study of people's bodies, of people's perceptions about their bodies and of people's attitudes towards their bodies, of people's experiences of their bodies, as these become manifest through exercise.

This is a study of ordinary people's perceptions and attitudes, namely of regular gym users, not of the fanatics of exercise (although I have studied some of those as well), nor of those who visit the gym very rarely or hardly at all. Moreover, and in contrast to the extensive focus on feminist literature reviewed in the last

chapter, my study is concerned with the experiences of both men and women. I believe that the examination of the perceptions, attitudes and views about the bodies of men adds much to an analysis which aspires to identify a number of relations beyond patriarchy that drive individuals to the gym.

Here, I explain more analytically why I have chosen the gym as the locus for carrying out a project which endeavours to trace and reveal as much as possible of Foucault's thought⁶⁰. I describe further how the empirical study has been organised and what tools have been employed for the collection of the data. These tools have been participant observation and interviews. I continue with a presentation of the reasons for which these tools were chosen and reveal the concerns, problems and issues that have surrounded all aforementioned methodological choices. Additionally, I refer to problems and issues that emerged during the conduct of the study. I continue with an evaluation of the overall way in which both the pilot and the main studies have been carried out. I finally speak about the method of analysis of the collected data and introduce the participants in the project.

4.1. Aims of the Project and Research Questions

As I have already explained (section 1.2.), the aims of this project are the following: to interpret afresh the work of Foucault on power and the body. It is to identify those social imperatives that regulate the ways we treat our bodies and help understand further the mode of operation of power. It is also to help explain contemporary society's values, needs and general way of functioning. Additionally, the empirical part of this study aspires to redress the alleged void that many have recognised in Foucault's work; namely, the absence of a 'truly' embodied account of power. By looking at the body and at the ways in which and the reasons why people treat their bodies in the gym, but also at how individuals' bodies live the experience of exercise and the effects of this experience, this study is expected to make a further contribution to the specific field of sociology of the body and illustrate how it can also acquire a more embodied character. Moreover, by looking at the various experiences of gym users the study is equally aimed at casting light on a number of

⁶⁰ On the process of describing a study, see, Lofland (1971: 130 onwards).

other elements of Foucault's analyses that have remained largely undertheorised by sociological commentators, like the ideas of power as a positive and productive force, but also of resistance and pleasure. It is also intended to contribute to the reduction of the tensions between Foucault's ideas and other approaches to them.

The more specific empirical questions that this project aspires to provide answers to are: What does the study of the gym tell us about power? What does the way in which people treat their bodies there tell us about power relations overall? What are the reasons that drive people to the gym? Why do people choose to treat their bodies in certain ways as opposed to others? What are people's aims and expectations of exercise? How do they experience exercise? How and what do people think of their bodies? How do they make sense of their bodies as materials? How do they feel that their bodies experience the world of training and the world overall?

Integrating my empirical project with the work of Foucault permits me to see precisely which social needs and imperatives formulate people's choices to exercise and their behaviours and attitudes towards their bodies. These are further expected to help me understand and be able to show ultimately what the beliefs, imperatives and needs of our contemporary societies are with regard to the treatment of our flesh and the overall deployment of our selves and personalities. For if Foucault is right, all effects of power, all effects of operation of our societies, should be written on and reflected in (the way that we shape) our flesh and the ways we treat our flesh will be able to tell us something about the societies we live in.

4.2. Research Strategies

The aims and objectives that this project aspires to meet have demanded a combination of strategies for the investigation of all aforementioned issues. As I have said the first aim is to examine critically Foucault's account of power and the use of the body. It is to understand how exercising individuals perceive ideas that are central to his work – such as discipline, pleasure and empowerment – and show how discipline, pleasure and empowerment may be experienced by individuals' bodies.

The aim is ultimately to make clearer the connection of these ideas with practical everyday experiences – to compare a theoretical schema with social reality.

In order to do this, I have already attempted in Chapter 2 to express Foucault's theory as an argument. I have presented a series of claims about what is power and how it operates, about the function of disciplinary techniques, about resistance and pleasure. I will try in the remaining parts of this project to see how much these claims match with my empirical data. In this way, I hope to be able to refute certain of Foucault's theses, should this be necessary, and corroborate others.

But there is another aim: to understand and show how people themselves perceive notions that are important in Foucault's work, again in order to explore the soundness of these notions. My research design would have to allow for descriptions of "social life in terms of social actors' motives" and "discover concepts [and] meanings" that will enable me to develop a representation of their perceptions that I could juxtapose with Foucault's work (Blaikie, 2000: 71, 86, 100-101). I thus move in seemingly opposite directions at different stages in this project (on the one hand, towards Foucault's theory, on the other towards social actors' words and experiences) but I believe that doing so is, in fact, useful for making sense of these abstract accounts on the one hand and social reality on the other.

Listening to people's narratives and creating an account of their views facilitates the understanding of the abstractly presented in Foucault's books, dynamic relations that I wish to explore. It enables me to represent the ideas of those who are caught up in the power relations that Foucault describes. This further enables me both to show the breadth of his formerly analysed theory and to provide a more accurate account of the social world and of how power operates in it (Blaikie, 2000: 107, 114, 119; also, pp. 159, 181-2).

Let me now address some of the other strategic choices and questions of this project.

4.3. The Gym: A Core Research Choice

The study of the body, the study of its move[ment]s, of its participation in certain activities and of its subjection to timetables and regulations is central to the

Foucauldian analysis of the functioning of power (see, sections 1.1.2, 2.1.5. and 2.2.2.). The gym is clearly a place where a number of rituals regarding the body – implemented on the body or writing their effects on the body – may be observed and, of course, followed by the attendants of the various programmes. Even to the ‘outsider’ to training culture that I was prior to embarking on this project, it was obvious that the gym was an environment where “every movement is counted and calculated” (Klein, 1993: 13). Thus, it seemed that a study of this venue and of people’s exercise practices would help me better to conceptualise the notion of operation of power on the body, of power that invested the body, as employed by Foucault.

However, this kind of study was not my original plan. Given that I not only wanted to explore Foucault’s work in more depth, but also that I saw as unfair the argument posed by many feminist writers that Foucault was providing a partial account of power because he had not taken into consideration the particular modalities of women’s embodiment; given further that I thought these feminist writers ignored how our male counterparts are also subjected to power and, having read a lot about the obsession with thinness (a highly debated topic amongst the many feminist authors who are critical of Foucault) in the course of my first year as a doctoral student, my initial plan was to explore anorexic men’s experiences of embodiment and power. However, a preliminary investigation confirmed that there were indeed many more women who were starving themselves and that it would be extremely difficult to find enough men to speak to on the matter. Although this did not seem to be a major problem in itself, there was another issue that posed additional and more serious concerns to an investigation of this kind. It was the fact that men’s self-starving practices were more likely to be attributed to psychological factors rather than to social influences. I felt thus, that if I pursued my original intention and investigated these cases, I would spend most of my time discussing the contestations between the disciplines of sociology and psychology rather than focusing on the work of Foucault. I would have to move away from my plan of explore the soundness of his theses and do an embodied sociological study. So, I abandoned this idea early enough and focused on the gym instead.

In addition to these reasons, a number of others contributed to the choice of the gym as the venue for carrying out my study. A significant one was the institution's obvious popularity (also, Sassatelli, 1999(b): 227). Not only is the gym a place for the treatment of the body but it is also a place that many more people attend nowadays compared to past times. This made me think that it would be easier to find a larger sample of participants for my project (as indeed proved to be the case), even if gym members remain a minority in relation to the whole population.

This last observation, the fact that the gym is a 'minority' venue, presented me with another dilemma. What could the fact that not everybody goes to the gym mean? What could it imply about Foucault's theories? Would one be right to presume, for instance, that those who do not go to gyms remain somehow unaffected by the 'carceral continuum' and the networks of power? Do they escape or resist power? Was Foucault right in arguing that none of us can exist outside the interplay of power relations? Could non-attendance at the gym be a form of resistance? Would this be what Foucault meant by resistance? These were questions that came to my mind at the time and made me also think that to pursue an investigation of this kind would be extremely interesting.

Let me continue. In addition to its growing popularity, it seemed to me that the gym is an institution that inspires and reflects a whole lifestyle. People of all ages and backgrounds make use of the facilities and participate in various training programmes. Figures show almost 7,000 visits a month in only one of the exercise centres in town where my study was conducted (I will call it the OLYMPICO), and up to 50 classes provided which run at different times and days during the week. There are also a variety of other options for exercise (like swimming or fencing) that the bearer of a membership card (a relatively cheap one, at least in this particular centre) has. It is precisely the variations in 'joining-in' fees and membership prices that allow people, regardless of their status and social class, to partake in different exercise programmes. And all these cannot but verify the significant position that the gym holds in the lives of many of us.

Moreover, apart from those whose lives revolved directly and more regularly around the gym, there are a number of people who choose to extend or transfer the practices of the gym to their homes. They exercise there. They transform rooms in

their houses into mini exercise-centres. They buy weights to train on their own. They may even spend considerable sums of money on machines like treadmills to place in some free space in the house and exercise there instead of or as well as going to the gym.

What I further noticed at the time that I was trying to organise my study, was that a variety of publications exist which encourage us to take up exercise and instruct us on a large number of issues related to training and on how to do it properly. A brief look at the stands of any newsagent's testified to this. In fact, it seemed to me that many of us, regardless of whether we actually attend a gym, are relatively well informed about these institutions' ways of function. Many of us are also often caught up in conversations about body-shape, body-size and other relevant themes, in some way or another, and most of us are aware of the options that we have, should we ever decide to join one or more of the existing programmes, and have indeed easy access to all the relevant information.

To me as an observer, both the popularity of the gym as well as the expansion of its practices outside its narrow limits and the fact that exercise is widely advertised implied that more and more people are currently clearly concerned with their bodies; they denoted that our culture in general is very much concerned and preoccupied with the body and its treatment and care. Moreover, the 'bringing' home of the techniques of the gym reminded me at the time of the design of my study of the idea of the carceral continuum that Foucault uses in his work to demonstrate how disciplinary practices expand outside the narrow limits of the prison. At a more general level, the fact of the gym's popularity and the expansion of its practices raised questions with regard to the reasons for this corporeal turn in our cultures, and what it signifies about contemporary social relations and about how we can understand these relations better.

In spite of this growing popularity, however, the gym seemed also to constitute for many outsiders, and surprisingly at times also for many of its members, an institution where a negative and rather oppressive form of discipline is applied and implemented⁶¹.

⁶¹ Inevitably, I will have to refer here, too, to pieces of information that I may be using in the analysis chapters as well, although here the purpose is completely different; to illustrate how they might have

There is something twisted in that [exercising]. I cannot understand why people choose to inflict such pain upon themselves. I think those who go to the gym, don't know what it is like to be in pain. Or maybe, they don't know because they exercise. Oh, well, true. It could be that.

So said an acquaintance of mine during an informal conversation. She is a 29 year-old doctor, who has a gym membership card but 'never bothers to go'. Sometimes even the opinions of many regular gym users for those who exercise more than themselves are quite similar. "I don't know how I ended up being friends with those freaks", one of my interviewees, Maria, said when describing the habits of her very close friends who spend hours (many more than she does) exercising daily. Her characterisation of them as 'freaks' implied something about the way she thought they exercise; excessively and rather painfully.

It is this association of the gym with control, self-imposed pain and discipline (as evident in these quotes), even with punishment (as I demonstrate in Chapter 6), that brought to mind the work of Foucault, DP in particular, and made the investigation of the case additionally interesting.

Another factor that made me choose the gym was that the belief the venue presented itself to my eyes at the time as a rather masculine environment. I felt that finding men to study and thus being able to examine more fully not only Foucault's theories but also a big part of feminist and other literature from the field of gender studies would be easier. It was another friend (a 26-year-old lawyer and a non-gym goer) who confirmed that this was not only my suspicion but that a number of people shared a similar view. He said:

I don't know but the gym always seemed to me as a more masculine environment. Women have so many other possibilities and options when it comes to looking after themselves and their bodies that the gym seems to be a place mostly for men.

Other friends' and acquaintances' comments when I started attending the various exercise programmes and training on my own also pointed in this direction. They

influenced and affected the research design or how they might have supported and justified the

seemed to verify, on the one hand, many of the feminist claims that only certain modes of training were appropriate for women and to prove, on the other, that the gym in general is a place for men. It is a place where one goes when one aspires to build muscles, to get tough, strong and aggressive and acquire all these attributes traditionally associated with masculinity. "I wanted to go because I wanted to develop my muscles and have all these masculine attributes that I never had", one of my interviewees, Albert, said.

I was talking to a female relative about attending BODYPUMP, a pre-choreographed weights class where one is given the option to adjust plates on a bar according to one's size and strength in order to carry out the relevant exercises: "Weight-level? As in 'weights'? So, you are doing weights? That's not nice [for a woman]", my relative said. "And you are using machines, too. You are not going to build big muscles, now, are you?" she added, stunned, when I tried further to describe to her how one is supposed to place the pin at a specific weight-level for one's constitution and build, in order to carry out certain exercises on the machines. Male acquaintances from the gym also made similar remarks, albeit jokingly most of the time. These comments reflected stereotypical views about the gym and about who 'should' be allowed to make use of it. These comments could be taken as signifying something about the ways in which femininity and masculinity are constructed and what their "images" should look like. They further confirmed that the gym should be seen mostly as a male environment: "She is doing rowing, bikes, weights ... She is tough!" said one friend.

You should leave the weights alone ... and go carry some food home from the super-market ... and cook. A woman's place is not in the gym,

another one added, laughing so hard that he could barely speak. What is interesting is that the comments were made by both insiders and outsiders to the gym culture.

The other thing that made an impression on me and made me feel that the gym was a good case study to help me examine the Foucauldian writings, was the use of words similar to those that Foucault employs in his texts by instructors and users of the facilities. This and a few other things I noticed after I had enrolled and

various methodological choices.

attended some classes confirmed also that the choice of the gym was ideal for examining the French philosopher's work. Phrases such as: "*power!*", "*control* the weights all the way up, *resist* them all the way down", "*controlled* movements" (which pointed to the notion of discipline), "this is good *fun*" (which implied pleasure), brought to my mind Foucault's terminology on power, resistance and pleasure. And their employment made me wonder whether there was indeed some similarity between the way he used these terms and the way other people did, even if they had never heard of the French philosopher and his work.

Another thing was also tempting me to conduct this type of research. It seemed to me that, apart from the fact that one could observe certain rituals which related to the body, the gym was also a place wherein an exchange of gazes was going on – looking at others but also looking at oneself and being looked at. At first, it appeared to me that this looking and surveying was a practice that was mainly taking place outside the gym, a practice the effects of which forced people to the gym. So Foucault's work also implied, and so the relevant literature suggested. The argument was that people go the gym because they want to get a nice or a nicer body, which they seemed to have felt they lacked in comparison to their peers or the models presented to them. But it also seemed to me that looking was in many instances an established and legitimate practice within the gym, definitely looking at one's self in the mirrors (which brought to mind the idea of self-surveillance) but, as I just mentioned, also looking at others and being looked at. As an outsider, I thought at the time that people who went to the gym cared about their bodies and the looks of their bodies immensely (maybe more excessively so than others). I also presumed at the time that they felt the gaze of others, they were used to it and that they at times even sought to be looked at. The gym seemed to be a 'great people-watching place', as one of my interviewees put it later. Moreover, the process of exercise itself exposed individuals to the judgement of others, to their gaze. And the presence and gaze of others could lead any exercising individual to a constant judgement of him- or herself. The gym was a place within which "the principle of total visibility" (PK: 147) was activated and gained its full meaning. As a locus of enhanced visibility, the gym presented itself to me as an institution similar to the prison that Foucault describes in DP. Exercise there did indeed take the form of a "panoptic

anthropometric disciplining”, as Mansfield and McGinn argue (1993: 53; similarly, Johnston, 1996: 332). And the ‘prints’ of exercise on the body are apparent, even when one leaves the venue in question. One could then argue that there is another sort of ‘continuum’ of the principle of visibility and a ‘continuum’ of the ways in which people behave towards their bodies (very similar to the continuum of the carceral practices that Foucault describes in DP). The gym was thus a place where the gaze seemed to always play an important role.

Since looking and surveillance seemed to me to be both important as well as latently acknowledged practices which were not reacted against, I felt also that I would have no problem in investigating ideas such as that of the effect of the gaze as they appeared in the work of Foucault. I believed that everyone who participated in the gym must have felt the effects of the gaze and would be able to speak about their experiences.

Another thing that made me feel that doing a study of the gym would be useful in analysing Foucault was noticing the slogan that read: “Looking good and Feeling great”. This slogan too seemed to prove to me that the gym constituted the ideal institution in the practices of which one could trace the “meeting line of the soul and the body” (THS, vol. 1: 20; also, section 2.2.2.). It seemed to say that the gym is the meeting line of soul (feeling, judging) and body (looking, treating, regulating). The shape of one’s body could indeed become in the gym “the marker of personal, internal order (or disorder) and a symbol of the state of [the individual’s] soul” (Bordo in Mansfield and McGinn, 1993: 53). Following the Foucauldian analysis, the shape of the individual’s body could also be seen as becoming the marker of ‘society’s soul’.

Briefly then, the gym is a place where one can see that different forms of exercise target different parts of the body. The aim of the process of exercise might be the reform of the soul (the ‘feeling great’) but it is the body – as Foucault has said and one may see – that is, once again, being touched for the purpose.

The gym’s interior design, as I will also extensively discuss in Chapter 6, allows for the control of one’s behaviour and attitude towards his or her flesh, without it being necessary that a “guardian” or advisor constantly instructs and

monitors the person who exercises - although people playing such a role exist there⁶². Mirrors, the spatial arrangement of various machines and the way the machines themselves are designed to work, all facilitate the process of self-mastery and self-regulation for the production of a body which will eventually be good, nice looking, active and overall useful – as Foucault argues – for the further development of society.

There was a dilemma, though. A different situation seemed to exist in exercise classes. There, the presence of instructors made a hierarchical structure more apparent and seemed to make Foucault's arguments on the non-existence of specific disciplinarians inappropriate to examine. Was this really the case? This should be also examined. And, in any case, how could all these relate to Foucault's account and what did they prove about it?

One final reason why the gym was ideal for an investigation of this kind was that the gym has what one, following Pratt (1986), could describe as a "positive value". It was, after all, evident that for some people the gym was 'good fun', as I hinted towards earlier. The gym was not to be strictly considered as a place where one could merely see rigid discipline at work – at least not a solely negative form of discipline. The gym is also a venue that allows for different kinds of pleasures to be experienced within the context of developing dynamics or relations of power, precisely because it provides so many different options (and consequently, choices) for exercise. It is also a venue of freedom and experimentation with the different forms of physical development. It is a place where one can test one's self, one's limits and ability to exercise in general. It is a place, furthermore, where knowledge may be acquired of individuals' capacities, talents, tendencies and habits and the actual capacities of their material bodies. It is a place where one can negotiate and – interestingly enough – resist the social norms that demand that we shape our bodies in certain ways. Yet, I must say that people's feelings of pleasure were not something that I sensed from the beginning of my study, but rather became slowly apparent to me.

⁶² The instructors, for instance, on whose seemingly hierarchical judgement we depend on how to do the exercises.

In sum, it seemed clear therefore that the gym, as an institution where people treat their bodies and interact, was the ideal place for a study of Foucault's work and a sociological study of the body to be carried out. It was all the parallels with Foucault's writings that I explained previously – gaze, discipline, machines, instructions, regulations, timetables, techniques of exercise, pleasures – that made the venue seem so interesting. It seemed to me that the gym followed “in microcosm the principles of normalisation, individuation and perpetual judgement that” have permeated society as a whole (Pratt, 1986) – according to Foucault. And it came as no surprise at the time to read that:

the indoor gymnasium was structurally related to and arose contemporaneously with the prison, the lunatic asylum ... and the school house in the context of a thoroughly spatial disciplining and functioning of social life (Eichberg, 1998: 62).

For all these reasons the gym seemed to me as the ideal place to study and try to understand Foucault's theory on discipline, power and the body.

To conduct this study, as I have implied, I felt I had to join the institution I had chosen to research as an active member. In this way, I could more easily become an insider to the environment and make better sense of its culture⁶³ and I could make sense of Foucault's work through personal experience, through participating in a network where different power forces seemed to be in operation and try to understand these forces myself⁶⁴.

4.3.1. Becoming an Insider

The fact that I was an outsider to the gym environment prior to my research created certain obstacles but also had a number of advantages. Never having been to a gym in my life before, I was very much in awe of the place in the early stages of my study. But, I was also unable to say whether what I thought of the gym, as a harsh

⁶³ On becoming an insider, see Merton (1972). Although Merton is of the opinion that the actual status of one as an insider or outsider is not the element that mostly determines the quality of social research and knowledge (1972: 41), I felt that it was still important that I tried to understand better this culture, for the reasons that I explain in the text.

⁶⁴ See, also, Cooper and Blair, 2002: 516, 522 on Foucault's suggestion to actively participate in power; additionally, Schwandt, 1999: 458.

disciplinary institution, was certainly the case. I must confess I had always previously thought of it as a ‘ghetto’ and thought of people who exercised in it as rather ‘freakish’ individuals who did not have a real life and did not know how to enjoy life.

On the other hand, there were a number of benefits emanating from the fact that I was an outsider. Firstly, whatever I saw or heard particularly at the beginning made a striking impression on me. I could notice things that others, who were already ‘insiders’ to this culture and had been exercising for a long time, were not able to notice or acknowledge or easily discern – for instance, how people struggled when doing the exercises or how excited they felt about achieving their goals. The degree to which these actions and reactions were noticeable to me, were not similar to that of those people who had been there longer⁶⁵. Others, because they had been training for a longer period of time were probably rather oblivious to these things that made a striking impression on me. In any case, attending the gym this additionally gave me the opportunity to learn a number of things about myself that I was never really aware of or never believed I could actually do in the past. This process of becoming an insider enabled me also to understand better Foucault’s abstract work on power, how we are all caught up in it, how we can negotiate the forces of power, how we can experience pleasures and how we can view discipline and power as productive forces. At a more practical level, what I saw and noticed at that early stage later helped me design the specific interview questions that I asked my interviewees.

I am going to describe now how I came to choose the specific exercise venues and illustrate some more of my agonies and concerns related to becoming an insider.

4.3.2. Choosing the Specific Exercise Venues

There have been two parts to this project and two places where the study was conducted. A pilot study was carried out at the University Gym (which I name the “UNIVERSAL”) and the main study at the municipal one (which I refer to as the

⁶⁵ On the ability of the researcher-outsider to take a “fresh look at the unknown”, see Ladino, 2002: 4.1.

“OLYMPICO”). Although a few months after I joined the first I left it for reasons that I will explain in the following pages, I still used that site as a resource of informants for the rest of my project.

I joined the university gym in February 2002. Having had in the past always considered people who went to gyms as rather odd and peculiar types and gyms themselves mainly as places of ‘torture’ (I was influenced too by all aforementioned comments like ‘infliction of pain’ and characterisations of the gym users as ‘freaks’ that many others made during informal conversations with me), I was intimidated when entering the venue for the first time. Yet, I also found the idea of doing empirical research of this kind ‘harmless’. It seemed I was getting involved in an activity that was not ‘negative’ or ‘traumatic’ for those who practiced it (unlike, for instance, would be the examination of people’s experiences of self-starvation). In fact, regular gym users seemed to enjoy exercise. However, I could still not understand how people could find pleasure in exhausting themselves (as it then seemed) in the Cardio-Vascular fitness room (from now on CV-room), the Nautilus room or the free weights room. Furthermore, I could not believe that I would ever be able to approach these people and ask them what I wanted to. I had the feeling that everyone would be distant and would be looking with dismay at the outsider who was entering their domain.

The first few days I was hesitant, only exercising briefly and leaving after half an hour or so, unless I joined a class. Gradually, I started enjoying the atmosphere. As I was becoming more familiar with the environment, I stayed in the gym longer. I still felt that I attended because I had a project to do but I also became more relaxed. This feeling of relaxation was facilitated by the fact that being at the university’s sports centre, I often encountered familiar faces from the academic milieu, including friends and fellow students. However, at the beginning, and for quite a while, even the comments of those people I felt more comfortable with could not take it out of my mind that the gym was a place of torture and discipline, or make me feel that the experience of exercise could actually be fun.

I was also utterly embarrassed thinking that I was going to be the one who would be looked down on as the ‘freak’ and laughed at and criticised for being completely ignorant and not knowing how to use the machines or do the exercises. It

took me a few days to understand that people did not actually care about what I did or did not do, and that they were not specifically looking at me to see if I could make proper use of machines or follow the instructions correctly. Although, as I have argued, looking is something that takes place in the gym, there seemed to be also a secret convention that the practice was reserved less for newcomers⁶⁶. People who had been exercising in the gym for longer would avoid looking at newcomers in order not to intimidate them. I, thus, began to feel after a while that everyone was there because they had their own reasons and purposes for training and did not really pay attention to ‘freshers’ in the environment. From what I saw, I realised that much like the inmates of the penitentiary that Foucault described in DP, the people in the gym would follow their routines and disciplines (timetables, patterns of exercise) rather mechanically and on their own, having well internalised the rules that brought them to the gym. But it was probably because I was primarily at the venue with the aim of observing them that I felt that the other participants would be looking back at me with the same ‘curiosity’. As Maria put it, when answering my questions about whether she looks at other people when she is training and whether she suspects that they might be looking back at her:

[T]hey might or might not but if you do it, you know that other people will do it as well. ... If you think, say, that you have a big butt and you go to the gym thinking that “oh, my God! Everybody is looking at my big butt”, not even the world could convince you that these people actually have lives and they don’t care about the size of your butt.

Her comment might help explain also why I was thinking that everyone would be looking at me, when I first arrived at the new environment. It was because I was thinking very much of my own role as an observer that I thought others would probably be thinking as well that I was indeed an observer and not just another gym user.

Let me continue with my introduction to this world.

⁶⁶ I noticed that, usually, newcomers to a class or the gym tend to occupy spaces where they believe they can be least visible. These individuals tend to look at people who are clearly more familiar with training, in order to gain confidence and further understand how to do the exercises, especially if they are alone. If they come with their friends or somebody they know, on the other hand, they are more likely to form small ‘cliques’ and seek confirmation of the way they are exercising in their friends’ or peers’ eyes.

Apart from choosing it because it was a place where I could see familiar faces from the university and I expected this to ease my introduction to the world I was observing⁶⁷, the other reason why I opted to begin my study at the UNIVERSAL was that initially I thought it would be worth investigating the experiences and ideas of a certain group of people, those between 18 and 25 years of age, as the relevant literature and information I had gathered up to then seemed to suggest that it was they who were affected more by beauty ideals and more preoccupied with their bodies and body image. I wanted to be closer to the group of people that I thought would be the focus of my attention for the rest of this project. However, my presence at the university gym made me realise that it was not only people of that age group that made use of the facilities. Yet, even if they were not only students who were visiting the place, they would mostly be people related to a certain milieu, that of academia, in some way or another. I felt thus that conducting my research at the university gym would leave me with a more segregated sample to study. The attendants of those facilities would not be able to give me as diverse answers to the questions that I was planning to ask given that, as I assumed, they would have more or less similar lifestyles and backgrounds, in spite of their age differences.

A few months later, having acquired some knowledge and confidence (by the end of the period of my presence at the UNIVERSAL I had managed to attend all of the training programmes at least once and was well aware of how to use most pieces of equipment) and once the observation material had started making sense to me (a significant amount of my field notes were collected during that period), I felt that the time had come to move on to the next stage. I would have to leave this venue and seek a new one to conduct my main study. I was seeking a larger and more varied group of individuals that could take part in my interviews – people from different backgrounds, leading different lives and with different experiences from those of the students and other members of the academic community. I chose the municipal gym where, with a reasonable monthly fee, people of many more different ages and social, educational and ethnic backgrounds could make use of a variety of the facilities for as long as they liked and attend a number of different classes running at different times during the day. They seemed to be a much more diverse sample. So

⁶⁷ On the benefits of ‘friendship’ as a method of social inquiry for the researcher, see Tillman-Haely

even though I would not be able to claim (and still cannot do so) the generalisability of my findings after the project was done (having only observed the situation in two venues and having conducted only twenty interviews), it would still be possible to claim that readers could identify with my interviewees or with their experiences and with elements of their personalities, precisely because the participants in my study have been so different from those of one another. Yet, I used informants from the university gym as well, for my project. Admittedly, one could argue that even this more diverse sample consisted of people who belong to a certain socio-economic type (students, professional, proto-professional individuals) and was, therefore, still not representative of the whole population. As I will illustrate, three of my respondents had not received higher education (Bruce, Diana and Albert) and two of them had dropped out from university (Jonathan and Barbara), but only one of them was a manual worker. This, again, could be said to have a certain impact on the findings as the majority of my informants lived and worked in environments where, quite possibly, they were influenced by the operation of different social rules, practices and constraints than, let us say, those in a purely working class environment. However, as my main aim has been to reveal, following Foucault, the wide range of imperatives (forces) that influence our behaviours towards our bodies rather than specific attitudes or actions of certain groups of individuals, I think that the lack of considerable social diversity (in terms of the interviewees' social class), has not significantly affected, in the end, the findings of my study which are, mainly, about the networks and modes of operation of power in Foucauldian terms. In other words, as the aim was to test empirically Foucault's accounts of networks and operation of power and since Foucault himself did not include a discussion of class in his theory, because [t]his theory to a large extent transcends class differences just as it transcends gender differences, I felt that there was no particular need for me to introduce the issue of class into my empirical investigation of his ideas.

Let me now continue with some more information about my trajectory to the municipal gym. I joined this establishment in August 2002. When I enrolled at OLYMPICO they offered me a free induction session. The next day I would meet an instructor and we would design together an exercise programme tailored to my likes

and standards. Again, I identified a Foucauldian parallel in this; the purpose of these sessions that were offered to any newcomer was to identify personal tendencies and preferences and 'build' upon them whatever one was hoping to acquire (beauty, strength, muscles and so on). As in the penitentiary where everybody's inclinations, habits and tendencies were taken into account for one's penalty, the same seemed to be happening in the gym. One's habits mattered in this place too and it was upon them that the personal training sessions were designed.

To get permission for my study and also to inform them of what I was planning to do, I wrote a letter to the managers of the institution. They agreed to provide as much assistance as they could by offering me space in their board-room to conduct my interviews if I asked for it and agreed to advertise the project in the premises with posters and flyers that I would give them⁶⁸. I also informed the people at the secretariat and many of my instructors that I was planning to carry out a study of this kind. I told them that my project would be based on material that would be collected from participant observation and interviews – to be conducted later – with other people who were training. This I did in order both to be ethically covered as much as possible⁶⁹ and because I hoped that by talking to these people, they would advertise the project in their classes or to their friends and I would thus gather a much larger sample to collect information from.

Parallel to training in the gym I was also trying a variety of classes in my quest to find those that would provide me with as broad a mixture of participants as possible. Sometimes, I went there in the mornings, sometimes the evenings. I would spend a lot of time there, particularly at the very beginning as I wanted to 'establish' myself as a figure in the place, so that later, when I would ask people to participate in my project, I would not have to face many negative responses. It was a courtesy that

⁶⁸ Parts of the correspondence with the managers and copies of the posters and the flyers can be found in Appendix A.

⁶⁹ When I joined the UNIVERSAL, because I was at a very early stage in my work and wanted to get accustomed to the new environment quickly, I did not think very much of the ethics of my research. Thus, I did not inform any of the managers about my project nor did I publicise it or make it known otherwise in the gym. That friends and people familiar with my work knew what I was doing and why I was there seemed enough. What was more, I knew the university gym was not meant to be the main venue of my study and I was simply there in order to familiarise myself with the whole experience of exercise, I thought that there was not much of a problem that I had avoided announcing openly the purpose of my presence to people other than my acquaintances.

I felt I had to show in advance to my potential future respondents. As my instructor at this induction session put it:

If you are to do such a study, since you'll need to call people to participate in it, you'll have to spend a lot of your time in this place. So, when you'll come to ask them to narrate their stories to you, they'll know who you are and feel comfortable talking to you. You can't be a stranger to them.

Because so many people attended the gym every day, using the posters and flyers was the only method I found suitable in order to inform them about my study rather than trying to approach each one personally. At least this way, more would have the opportunity to know that there was a study going on although it was still impossible that all users of the gym would know of my work. It was with the same posters and flyers that I invited people to take part in my interviews. The method proved unsuccessful. Initially, I thought it might have had to do with the topic (people's embodied practices and experiences, although the study was not advertised as such). I realised however, that it was probably the fact that people were preoccupied with their training that made them ignore my invitations⁷⁰. Yet, I had the opportunity to talk to gym-users individually and directly about my study and these attempts were all successful. Informing those who were training in classes rather than the nautilus room or free weights room was much easier for me, as we would normally wait outside the dance-rooms for a couple of minutes before we started our common training programme. So as we exchanged the typical 'how are you, today?' we also had some time to talk about other things and I had the opportunity to discuss the project with them.

There was also an incident that facilitated further the revelation of my purposes to a larger number of people. A few weeks after I signed up at the OLYMPICO and a couple of weeks before my posters were put up, someone came to film one of our BODYPUMP classes for broadcast on television. We were asked

⁷⁰ People did not usually bother to read what was on the notice-boards, unless it was an advertisement for a new training program. That they ignored other signs and notices one of my instructors verified as well. He said that they do so not only because they are coming mainly to exercise but also because they simply do not care. He added characteristically, pointing at the wall: "you see, we advise them with notices like this not to take their coats in this room", which had the majority of training

whether any of us minded the presence of the camera (it was going to focus mainly on our instructor, they said, but there would be also some general shots of the room with us exercising). No one said they did. It was then that I took the opportunity to announce to the rest of the group that I was also doing a project on exercise and body ideals and attitudes towards the body. I told them that the study involved participant observation and interviews and informed them that they would soon be invited to participate in my interviews. Our training programme started immediately after my statement but overall there did not seem to be a reaction of discomfort. Some broad smiles appeared that I interpreted as outcomes of a first, and quite successful, 'ice-breaking' endeavour. Of course, some of these smiles might also have been indications of disbelief. Nonetheless, what was more important for me at the time was that I had managed to inform the group of my study.

However, the whole incident with the camera came to show me something else as well. Although aware of the potential that we might appear in the film, no one in the group seemed to care. We were, in a sense, exposing (together with our instructor) ourselves to the gaze of a number of other potential viewers. We were disposing quite easily of our 'privacy' in the class. Probably this was precisely because we knew that we were not the primary focus of the film, but this was none the less an indication that we could afford to be 'looked at'. This confirmed my impression that on the whole in the gym a latent agreement somehow existed that looking was not completely unacceptable.

Gradually, I also started to become friends with many people at the gym. We were not only sharing the same experiences in the gym but were also socialising outside it. With some we would even come to share more personal information about our lives. I was beginning really to care for them and I could feel that they cared for me as well. No need to say that all my previous thoughts of them as 'freaks' disappeared soon⁷¹, and I wanted to be with these people and spend time with them even longer than I would ever have imagined.

equipment. "Yet, look, what do they do? Not only do they carry whatever stuff they've got in here; they even leave it under the notice board". A pile of coats lay on the floor.

⁷¹ On how this process of becoming friends with participants to the study might challenge the researcher's views and assumptions see, also, Tillmann- Healy, 2003: 743, 746.

4.4. The Sample

As I have mentioned earlier, right from the early stages of the study it became apparent that I should not be focusing on a specific age group. People of all ages attended the gym as I have shown, even the university one. This fact made me change my view that younger individuals would be much more likely to exercise, since they were more likely to be influenced by their peers, the media and the fashion industry about their body image and made to fall subject to the various social norms and imperatives regarding appearance. The fact that many others attended the gym too, made me also think that it was probably not only beauty (that adolescent, androgynous beauty that I have previously spoken of) that exercising individuals were after and that their aims for going to the gym would probably vary. So the original idea to focus on people between 18 and 25 years of age was dismissed.

As I have also said, the gym was additionally chosen because it was seen as more of a male environment and I expected therefore to be able to find more or equally as many men as women to speak with about their experiences of exercise. Conducting interviews with both men and women would facilitate a more thorough testing of many of the feminist authors' claims on the breadth and nature of the work of Foucault and an investigation of the relationship of all these accounts with one another. I expected further that that this way, a more balanced, less partial sociological account could appear than the existing ones of the types of social norms or standards that people try to comply with and the social perceptions and needs that inform our behaviours towards our bodies. Attending the gym, however, proved that more women exercise overall and indeed it was mostly women who attended classes whereas men were more 'segregated' in the machines' and weights' areas (although many women also made extensive use of machines and weights). Yet, although my perception of the gym as a male environment was no longer as strong, I still managed to find enough men to speak to for the purposes of my study.

My final sample consisted of 11 women and 9 men, between 19 and 45 years of age. Twelve are British with the remaining nationalities as follows: one comes from the United States, one from France, one from Bermuda, one from Australia, one

from Sweden, one from Cyprus and two from Greece. Thus, although at a very small level, I could also notice in their narratives the similarities or differences of opinion that are associated with their ethnic backgrounds. Seven of them, eventually, were students (four undergraduates and three postgraduates)⁷² and the others were working in the public or private sector. Two described themselves as former athletes who dropped their athletic careers for health reasons, two work as instructors in the OLYMPICO and one of them is the programme development manager at the venue. Four of them are married (three women, one man) and two of them have children.

Each person exercised in the gym three to five times a week, for about two hours each time. They described themselves not as ‘gym-freaks’ but certainly not as ‘couch-potatoes’ either. A few (three) said they go to the gym less now (twice a week) than they used to do in the past or concentrate mainly on other activities such as swimming, instead of using the equipment or attending classes. Some of the participants, no matter which gym of the two (the OLYMPICO or the UNIVERSAL) they were attending at the time, had also happened to have visited the other one too. It was also possible that although some interviewees were now going to one of the two gyms, they were in parallel attending certain programmes at some other private or more expensive exercise club elsewhere in town.

Apparently, then, there was a wide mixture of people that had different life stories and different experiences. They were not a segregated sample but a rather diverse group, a group more likely to express different opinions on a variety of issues about life, among which would be those of interest to me; people’s experiences of discipline, power and pleasure, and their feelings about their bodies.

4.5. The Research Tools

Particular methodological tools and particular research methods come usually to the services of different research aims and strategies, although the boundaries of the use of each are not rigid, social researchers inform us (see, Blaikie, 2000: 125). The techniques that have been employed for obtaining the relevant evidence in this case are, as I have stated already, participant observation in a ‘natural’ setting (the

⁷² I realised after the pilot study that they did not share the same views and were not as segregated a

gym) and semi-structured interviews that often took place in a semi-natural setting, on the periphery of the gym environment, within the venue's premises, but also at different venues (on the 'settings' in social research, see Blaikie, 2000: 187, 191, 234).

4.5.1. Observation and its Qualities; and Some Ethical Concerns

Participant observation at both the university and the municipal gyms has proved an invaluable tool for the collection of data. It has also been a generator of questions and ideas regarding both the possible ways of interpreting the material and further organising the empirical work (Blaikie discusses these qualities of observation in 2000: 64-5, 238). For example, during the first visits to the gym, when I was still not familiar with the whole idea of training, I would be impressed by how people kept on exercising with vigour and passion – almost “obsessively”, as it then seemed to me. They would not stop until they were absolutely sweaty and run completely out of breath. I used to wonder why people would push themselves to such limits, why they would treat their bodies in that way, what it may be that they expected their bodies to be able to do. I thought that they were indeed punishing themselves for flaws in their appearance and that they were indeed struggling to reach certain standards of beauty. With time, however, having myself experienced the rigour of exercise, I would not get as shocked by any analogous spectacle. I tended to view such behaviours, by and large, as “natural” and would let them, often, go unnoticed. Methodologically or analytically, this has both benefits and pitfalls. As I internalised the rules of exercise, I was expanding – in a sense – my limits of “acceptability” of certain attitudes towards the body. On the other hand, the more I integrated into the environment of my fieldwork, the less easy it was becoming for me to get impressed by “extremes”. It became difficult to set new questions, in order to grasp and analyse the meaning of these extreme cases and also explore as easily the accounts I had in mind.

At the very beginning, observation involved spending a few (at least two) hours every day in the gym exercising myself and at the same time ‘studying’ other

sample as I believed initially.

people while they were training. This helped me observe a variety of peoples' patterns of behaviour towards their bodies.

When in the Nautilus or the CV room or the weights area, I would usually choose a place for my training in a corner, in front of a mirror, so that I could easily observe what was happening in the rest of the space. The arrangement of the equipment is anyway in most of the cases such that would not prohibit my visibility. When in classes, on the other hand, I would often take a place at the middle-back so that I would have a clear view of the whole group.

At home, I would keep a diary⁷³, either hand-written or tape-recorded when the rigor and intensity of exercise had taken their toll on my body and made it difficult to pick up a pen and put on paper all the information, thoughts and questions that had arisen during the hours of exercise.

Due mainly to the practical difficulty of keeping notes when training, the process always took place at home afterwards. But I did this retrospective note-taking for a number of other reasons too. I considered it rather unnecessary to take my diary to the gym with me. It was not so much that I believed that being seen to be observing others could have had an impact on their performance⁷⁴. It was rather that I myself was already intimidated by this new environment. I thought that if people saw me with a diary they would feel that I was the 'freak'. Besides, I do not believe in retrospect that they would have minded the fact that I was looking at them for a research purpose. Exercise was something gym goers were doing for their own purposes and so I feel they would not have really cared about my presence there. But I am of the opinion that if I had had my diary, this would have confirmed constantly

⁷³ It was not necessarily different types of files that I would keep, separating the facts from my own feelings, impressions, personal experiences or questions that would occur to me. I chose, however, to include all these details in two volumes (one for the participant observation and one for the interviews), in chronological order, and refer back to them whenever necessary (see, Lofland, 1971: 118-121, for suggestions on file-keeping).

⁷⁴ References to a number of studies that claim that the 'intrusion' of the researcher in the environment of the study might affect the behaviour of the studied group see in Herrera, 1999: 332-3. Herrera is actually against the use of these arguments because they do not have an effect in making the use of covert methods less suspicious and deals more with the issue of impracticability of covert methods (1999: 340). Also on the harm that may be caused to participants to a study and the obligation of the researcher to avoid such harm and be sensitive towards them, see Guillemin (2004: 272, 278).

my own position as an outsider to the gym and made it more difficult for me to adapt to the new environment quickly⁷⁵.

Some could, of course, counter-argue that this was probably not ethical behaviour on my part, as I was not revealing my identity as a researcher in some way or another. But, as I have just mentioned, apart from being impracticable, note-keeping would be embarrassing for me as a researcher and hence possibly unethical for me too, as it would have exposed me to a behaviour that would have been totally unconventional for an environment like the gym. Going around with a notebook, looking at people and frantically writing down everything they were doing or everything that was taking place in the premises. Besides, as I have also mentioned, it also became clear to me a while after I joined the gym that, to some extent, every person who exercises is aware prior to coming to a venue like this of the fact that he or she will be exposed to the gaze of others. And although one may not speculate that this happens for the purpose of him or her becoming the subject of a further study, one submits oneself before one's entry to that specific environment to the principle of visibility (section 4.3.). And one disposes of the privacy of one's being and flesh, at least for that specific time of training. This seemed to be particularly the case when people joined classes. They acknowledged subconsciously, one could plausibly argue, that they were going to be looked at – by the instructors certainly but also by others in the group, and they did not seem to mind it⁷⁶. Moreover, and to dare an interpretation closer to Foucault, it was my impression after studying the relevant literature that it was because people were subjected to the principle of visibility in

⁷⁵ Surprisingly, the literature on ethics in qualitative research seems to take for granted on most occasions the powerlessness of the subject of study (see, Lee, 1993: 110-1) whereas it often assumes the powerful position of the researcher. In trying to 'protect' the observed so totally, it fails to acknowledge the problems of the conductor of an empirical project himself or herself, their fears, the apprehensions for their own exposure, their potential embarrassment, their feelings, particularly when they deal with something previously so unfamiliar to them (see, Ladino, 2002: 1.3). If power is multilayered and dynamic as Millen reminds us (1997: 2.3) and held by everyone, as Foucault has argued, it must be also so in the context of any investigation, as a social occasion, too. It would be probably wrong, therefore, to assume that only the researcher has power (also, Millen, 1997: 3.3-3.4).

⁷⁶ It seemed to me further that it is actually the need to be looked at is one of the reasons why many join the classes. They want to be looked at, in order to be sure that they are carrying out the specific bodily tasks in the right way. This can also explain further Sassatelli's argument that in the training room the poses held, the looks exchanged and the instructions given (i.e. "stick out that butt", like one of our instructors often says) are never taken at face-value, whereas outside the space of the gym they might be considered, even, insulting. See also, the incident with the camera where it may be seen that certain latent conventions work in the gym that make people not mind about matters that outside its limits could even cause them distress.

advance and outside the gym mainly, that they go to the gym for. They felt they were indeed being looked at, possibly in a way that did not do justice to them (or so the studies formerly presented seemed to suggest) and exercised to get a body, an image, an appearance that would be flawless. It is for this reason that I presumed that they would not be offended when looked at while in the gym. If one were to agree, namely, with the idea that people internalise the various social norms concerning their appearances and go to the gym and train in order to 'look good', one could also argue that training individuals – to a certain extent – consciously are aware of the gaze of others upon them. But as long as they pursue their aims, they can be satisfied. The gym is seen only a means to (whatever) end people have about their body.

For all these reasons, I chose to do the observation without making it obvious at every moment that I was studying the people around me. I should add, however, that at this stage of observation, it was, in any case, general patterns of behaviour and the dynamics that develop in the gym that I studied, rather than individuals and their experiences as such. Although the project overall was focusing on something as private as the body and people's ways of treating their bodies, my methodology was not limited to the examination of individuals and their bodies *per se*. And, in my view, the way that my study was organised clearly prevented an actual invasion of people's most private sphere and it has thus been ethical overall.

Let me now return to the issue of note keeping and give a sample of the exact information that has been included in my diary, in order to show more clearly what I mean with the above comments. I collected notes regarding facts; what were the busiest hours in the gym, how many people were there, whether it was mostly men or women, to which age groups they belonged, which types of training they seemed to prefer, and so on. There are also general descriptions of various patterns of behaviour or of the effects of exercise, as these were seen occurring in the training rooms, and my first attempts to interpret them. Additionally, one can find questions that inspecting these attitudes brought to mind. Moreover, I recorded instructions that were given during training sessions and discussions of the ways in which these instructions were given⁷⁷. Equally, comments or remarks by people were included

⁷⁷ Recording of such instructions or other relevant language provided general hints about the existing social ideals and norms that inform our behaviour towards our bodies. "Are you ready to build nice

both from inside and outside the gym, regarding the nature of exercise overall or the purpose or impact of particular forms of exercise for and/or on the body (“it’s good to feel your body and be able to tell what you are able to do with it” was a common one) as well as personal feelings, impressions and opinions. Lastly, of course, there were written ideas regarding the connection and integration of all aforementioned details to the theoretical accounts presented so far.

Let me now illustrate how I treated particular things that I noticed using the following examples: one was, that both gyms I attended were mostly crowded in the evenings after five pm, although the municipal gym had other ‘peak hours’ throughout the day as well. In the OLYMPICO, I observed that in the mornings the majority of attendants were people over a certain age (it was when mostly the “50+” classes were being run) or parents who would leave their children at the crèche and take the opportunity to exercise or would take the youngsters to swimming lessons and other sports. The management, it was obvious to me, was trying to accommodate the needs of everyone who wanted to exercise.

After five pm, as I said, both venues would live their moments of glory. Often people would queue for a machine. And no doubt one would have to book days in advance if they wished to attend one of the most popular exercise classes. Noticing this had both a practical impact on the way that I conducted the study but also raised interesting questions as to how to go about interpreting what I saw. The practical effects was that because people in the Nautilus and weights rooms did not seem as easily approachable nor as talkative as in the classes (‘I don’t go to the gym to socialise, I go to the gym to train’ would be something many would admit during our conversations, weeks or months after we would have first seen each other there), and because I felt I needed to start with the interviews sooner than later, I decided to abandon my personal exercise programme and begin attending these groups more often. Things were, indeed, much more relaxed and people far more sociable in classes. There was always some time, as I mentioned, which could be used to talk to others before or after the lesson. Even more importantly, every class had its regulars or even fanatics that would be there week after week, faces that would become (as they did) more and more familiar as time went by. After a few months I eventually

legs tonight?” or phrases like “stay strong for me, guys”, seemed to point to the aims for which people

decided to concentrate on evening classes, since they attracted a much wider range of people that I could pick from for my interviews. Some of the people that I finally invited to take part in the study, though, I had also seen many times often in the morning classes. The Bodypump, Bodystep, Body Conditioning and Aerobics were those programmes that I attended most and where I met most of my informants. The Bodypump and the Bodystep were two classes that both men and women would attend in roughly equal numbers (admittedly more the Bodypump than the Bodystep), although in both cases women would outnumber the men. The people who attended these classes belonged to all different age groups. This was because although the exercise was rigorous, there were options that the instructor would give us to carry out each of the tasks and we would follow the routine according to our will or capability.

The theoretical problem that this observation raised was related to this: the very fact that the gym became extremely busy between late-afternoon and early-evening hours and at weekends⁷⁸ was one that made the idea of further investigation of the practices and attitudes towards the body through interviews compelling. It was quite impressive seeing crowds arriving at the gym after what could have been an exhausting day at work – be it mental or physical. To them, surprisingly, it did not seem to matter. To the non-regular goers these people seemed to be really “courageous”. This is the expression, Sherah, one of my interviewees – a fairly sporty person but one who dislikes the gym – used to describe them. They could have immediately returned home and enjoyed a relaxing evening there instead. So, what really forced them to be there?

On the other hand, the fact I noticed that it was mostly women who participated in classes, changed – as I mentioned – my view about the gym being mostly a male environment. At some point, this even made me worry that I would not be able to do the kind of study that I wanted, where I would be able to explore men’s experiences of exercise and their relationships to their bodies. However, as I also noted previously, the numbers of men who were training in the nautilus- and the

usually exercise (beauty, strength and so on).

⁷⁸ Although, it needs to be mentioned that – because people’s timetables change during weekends and they can have more leisure time – the sense was not the same, as they did not all gather at the gym at certain hours.

weights-rooms were sufficient to give me the hope that I would manage eventually to do what I had planned. What I realised was that men seem to prefer training more on their own than women did. An exception to this has been the CIRCUITS class (which involves intensive exercises for all parts of the body), where the proportion of men and women has been very much the same (see, also, relevant point in Sassatelli, 1999(a): 3.1.). This was particularly surprising for me at the time, as the Circuits was a very intensive, not typically aerobic class and the majority of the relevant literature suggests that women would avoid such classes as they could help one build muscles and strength. There, as well as in the cardiovascular fitness room, the numbers between male and female trainees did not differ. It was only at the university gym's weights room (a separate room in this case), that I noticed that it was mostly men who were training. This was not so much the case in the OLYMPICO. This is not to suggest though that weightlifting is not a popular form of exercise among women. In fact, one of the things that struck me as very bizarre when I first started attending the classes at the municipal gym was how many women participated in BODYPUMP, which involves the use of weights, and how heavy weights women lifted. This seemed to me to point to the fact that they (those who are aware of the specific training opportunities offered by/within the gym, at least) do not treat weightlifting necessarily as a manly type of exercise and that they would pursue a type of workout that would allow them to acquire a more clearly muscular figure and build their body strength. In discussing my observation with friends of mine who had not had much experience of exercise in the gym and were not as familiar with the various training programmes provided by it, I realised that they were as surprised as I to know that women constituted the majority of participants in such classes. They would further be amazed to learn that these women belonged to very different age groups.

These observations seemed to me to overturn those feminist arguments that created the impression that certain social norms may exist, which demand that we distinguish on the basis of gender between the various forms of exercise (see section 3.2.) or that associated specific types of exercise with one gender or the other, such as men with weightlifting for instance. These facts seemed to contradict the idea of the existence norms that women concentrate on particular types of training (that are more related with a specific kind of feminine aestheticism) rather than on others.

These cases seemed to me to signify that rules that effectively reproduce patriarchal relations within and consequently outside the confined limits of the gym, requiring women to construct their bodies in particular ways through participation in certain activities only, probably did not prevail as widely or were not as rigid as the literature suggested. It seemed to me that the women who worked out and attended such programmes had probably succeeded in transgressing the social standards that want them to be or look passive and weak. Their behaviour seemed to imply that they trained in order to become strong, toned and visible like their male counterparts. They were working constantly towards that goal. They were active. They wanted to follow a well embedded social imperative, expressed in the gym's advertising flyers, to "stay active". By observing these behaviours, one could not fail to see that, although these women were caught up in the networks of disciplinary power that are inescapable according to Foucault, simultaneously they manage to show that they were resisting the aforementioned patriarchal norms, that demand that they stay small, passive, powerless and invisible. In short, they were empowered by participating in the networks of power, just as Foucault would say.

However, discussions with other trainees later came to contradict these initial impressions and reflections. Some of these people insisted that women do these forms of exercise in order to acquire the bodies that patriarchal societies want them to have toned and slim bodies and be desirable for the opposite sex.

I will refer more analytically to these comments in the following chapters but the reason why I am also discussing my concerns and ideas at the time I was observing all these here, is precisely because I want to show the qualities and value of observation in generating all these thoughts and questions. What could have been the exact motives and forces that drive individuals to the gym? Which broader social imperatives inform their behaviour? What types of power networks are functioning and guide their steps to the training centre? Which discourses of power persuade them of the necessity of training? And which could be the pleasures that participants derive from the experience of joining the club's activities?

At the same time, these examples show the pitfalls and failures of this particular methodology to reveal clear answers to these a number of questions, like exercise, discipline, pleasure or the 'gendered' habits of training.

Let me sum up. In brief, observation particularly at the beginning, increased the outsider's wonder as to why people subject themselves (and their flesh) to such discipline as exercise. Overhearing sometimes the complaints of the gym goers that said: "if I had a choice, I would never come here", could not but make me question the existence of any benefits in this sort of activity. Agreeing, at that stage, with the whole debate on control and the relations of power that catch people up in the pursuit of goals that are beyond their reach and make them rigidly regulate their lives and the activities of their bodies was inevitable. I could feel the effects of rigid discipline in operation, discipline that many exercised upon themselves.

Slowly, however, as I got used to the environment and to the routine of training myself, I saw that observation was starting to provide me with different information, allowing a different interpretation of the whole situation of training⁷⁹. I began to notice how energetic people were after training. I could see how proud they felt when accomplishing their goals. All these patterns of behaviour and reactions also made me think that maybe the whole experience of exercise was not only one of discipline and control. It was additionally one of pleasure, empowerment – empowerment of the flesh as well as of the mind (people could do more with their bodies and felt indeed that they could do so) – liberation, transgression of one's limits, knowledge of one's capabilities, awareness of one's state of being and achievement of one's aims. It brought to my mind Foucault's writings that describe power as a productive force and revealed to me the full spectrum of the concept as used by the author.

Observation thus facilitated a first connection of the empirical data to Foucault's account and gave me hints for the further interpretation of his ideas. It gave me also ideas as to how to treat other writings that attempted to interpret Foucault or described the gym culture. However, it alone was not enough to help with a more in-depth analysis of these works. I have shown the diverse and ambivalent explanations that the use of this tool could produce. Precisely here lay the first problem. Had the study been limited to this information, much of a subsequent

⁷⁹ "Within the visual category" argues Alan Peshkin in the discussion of his methodological choices in his own research, "were numerous occasions or themes for directing my attention" (2001: 239). Similarly for me, the observation of the same activity (exercise) that gave me the opportunity to think on one instance of control was giving me now the opportunity to think about people deriving pleasure from it.

attempt to explain why people do the things they do, what influences them, to what mechanisms or relations they are subjected, or how they experience power and resistance on their flesh, would have been partial and speculative. The reason is that although participants' bodies spoke their histories during this process of data collection, they spoke a language that one could not clearly, and should not arbitrarily, interpret. The need to do interviews seemed, thus, compelling. I believed that it was the interviews that could illuminate facts, ideas and attitudes, and enable me to link all these elements to the background theories.

4.5.2. The Qualities of Interviewing: Some More Ethical Issues

I will now look at how the interviews have helped answer the questions that observation left open and examine in depth basic concepts of Foucault's work. Let me use as an example a quote from Francis, one of my interviewees, and her view of why people exercise. She says:

It's a yuppie thing [to do]. I think that people go because they think they should ... I mean, when I've had a hard day and watch TV rather than go and exercise. I can't imagine it unless there is a good reason to work out like being stressed or angry.

It is obvious that for Francis exercise is indeed a difficult thing to do and a tiring process. But one could also draw from her words the idea that for some people (those stressed or those wanting to get rid of negative energy) training may constitute something that can be pleasurable or a way out of their problems, namely, a positive and empowering experience. For what else could the release of aggression or stress be, apart from a positive thing? Interviews gave me the opportunity to discuss all these thoughts and afterthoughts of mine with my informants. I thus found myself learning *directly* from people that, together with the need to discipline themselves, pleasure is also a reason why they go to the gym. I was coming to realise with various prompts that I should not be treating their feelings from exercise necessarily as "repressive" ones or as signifying that people led repressed lives. Those who participate in exercise should not be seen only as suffering when working out, I was told. They could also be seen as believing that they can achieve something through

training and as enjoying the process. They may feel empowered, to put it in a more Foucauldian way (see, PK: 119, on power that is not only limiting and oppressive).

Responses like that Francis gave me would make me want to explore further the meaning that people attribute to their actions (how they perceive of what they do)⁸⁰ and, on the basis of their accounts, to try also to understand Foucault's theory on power. Interviewees' responses indicated how compelling an empirical study was to help illuminate all different aspects of this theory and check if it was accurately reflecting social reality but also to reveal the wide range of people's feelings and opinions. Conversations would help get deeper to an investigation of matters such as the discipline associated with the pleasures that derive from exercise and the meanings that participants in the study attribute to them. Such were my justifications behind the choice of this methodological tool.

I shall now turn to describe how the interviews were designed and organised. First, I took a close look at the data provided by the process of observation. Then, I devised specific questions that would enable respondents to provide as many details as possible on their experiences of training. Drafting the questions was a process that took quite some time. The initial plan became subject to numerous revisions, especially after the pilot study and the first interviews had been conducted. I shall show further down more extensively how the pilot, in particular, helped in this direction.

Examining people's attitudes, their exercise patterns and feelings about exercise, but also their feelings about their bodies and their body images, and expecting interviewees to reflect on these matters, was done with the overall aim of revealing more about the social imperatives, needs and ideals that inform such behaviours and experiences⁸¹. I expected their answers to such questions to show what types of dynamic relations, relations, that is, of power – to use the Foucauldian term – operate in society, make use of the body, drive it to the gym and constantly reproduce and re-structure it. I was hoping that these answers would demonstrate

⁸⁰ On the importance of conversations in understanding meanings people attribute to their actions and understanding better the language we share, see also Schwandt (1999: 453).

⁸¹ On how reflexive thought is bound to the culture and society that we are parts of, see Adams (2003: 231). This has been presupposed and this is why interviews in this case were chosen, too. It turned out that the reflexivity of the interviewees gave interesting information about our cultures. See, also, Rubin and Rubin (1995: 20).

precisely what these power mechanisms are and what they aim at. I expected additionally to see if people felt and how they made sense of their bodies as living materials. I expected this information to be unravelled in the course of the interviewees' narrations about their feelings at the time of training and about their body-histories. It was clear to me, however, that the attempt to bridge Foucault's elusive writings with specific interview questions would be, on the whole, extremely challenging. Finally, then, in order to investigate all the aforementioned issues in depth, I asked the following⁸²:

First, I posed a few personal questions, on the life and background of each interviewee. These would help me get to know my informants better, 'break the ice', but would also make introduction to the themes directly related to the topic smoother.

These first questions were followed by a number of others regarding the respondents' reasons for and habits of exercise. These would illuminate the forces that took them to the gym, the social ideals or mandates that made them exercise, but also illustrate particular aspects of the disciplinary mechanisms that they subjected themselves to and give information about things like the power of the gaze and the routines people are made to follow. Interviewees were asked specifically why they exercise and what motivates them to spend some (or many) hours a day in a gym. They were asked about the types of exercise they do and why they choose these particular ones as opposed to others, whether they have personal instructors or prefer to join classes⁸³ and were invited to justify their choices. They were asked how much time of their daily life exercise takes. They are also invited to say what their impressions from exercise are, how they feel about it, how they feel when in the gym, how focused they are on what they are doing when in the gym, what the gym as an environment means to them (this was expected to reveal also how they may resist the operation of discipline and illuminate what they really prioritise when they go to the gym), whether they experience training as discipline or pleasure. To further help with the analysis of such matters and with the evaluation of the experience of

⁸² For the specific questions, see Appendix B.

⁸³ These questions were mostly informed by the accounts that seem to point that women do different types of training than men and that exercise in classes is addressed mainly to female participants and is aiming at constructing their bodies in certain ways. They were also hoped to illuminate relevant different patterns of exercise behaviour, should they exist.

training interviewees were asked to describe good or bad experiences that they associated with training and explain what made these experiences so.

Interviewees were then invited to talk about their bodies and describe their relationships to their bodies. The aim of these questions was to facilitate an understanding of how the body is caught up in the techniques of power but also to show how these people make sense of their corporeality; of their bodies as lived and living materials. Interviewees were questioned about how they feel about their bodies and how they see their bodies. They were asked what they expect from their bodies and what they believe exercise enables their bodies to do. Finally, participants in the study were asked for their ideas on the standards regarding the 'looks' of men and women.

The pilot study was a useful lesson on how to conduct the interviews. It provided an opportunity to see which questions needed to be reformulated, which could have been more persistently asked, which had not been as effective in delivering data or which matters could have been more thoroughly discussed. A set of questions that were devised in fact after the pilot were those inviting respondents to present their 'body biographies'. Pilot interviews were also worth conducting because they helped me as a researcher to study my topic more in depth and see a wide range of opinions emerging. They further helped me to become more relaxed during the main study and get an idea of what reactions or comments I could possibly face later. Analogous were the experiences from the initial, main-study interviews. As the sample changed largely from close friends and fellow-students, whom I had mostly known prior to the discussions, to people with whom I had no other previous connection apart from the fact that we would meet sometimes during the week in the gym, I found that more attention had to be given to personal introductory questions. But the major assistance the pilot study provided was that, by the time I started the actual project, I had a better idea of the specific thematic units that I wanted to investigate and had come to realise better how they linked to the main research questions presented in section 4.1.. Subsequent modifications were, thus, concerned with rather peripheral matters.

The order of the questions changed sometimes, according to the interviewees' responses. This did not pose a problem because interviews were designed as semi-

structured (see, also, Burgess, 1991: 101 on semi-structured interviews) and questions were largely open-ended, in order to allow for as much information as possible to be collected. Additional questions were also employed on occasions (or the main ones were rephrased), according to the replies received each time, in order for discussions to be further facilitated and for a deeper understanding of the ideas under scrutiny to be achieved.

The main questions' open character helped conversations to flow freely, but at the same time, it ran the risk of respondents getting carried away as they narrated their experiences. This would make the process of interpretation more difficult, as it would be harder to extract the relevant information from all the data. Such problems I attempted to control in advance by adding to the broader interview questions some more direct ones.

In any case, the ultimate strength of having structured discussions in this way was exactly the fact that a plethora of relevant data could be accumulated. I thought that this potential outweighed other disadvantages or difficulties that emanated from the use of the methodological tools or from the exploration of such elusive and abstract work as that of Foucault. The danger of misinterpreting the individuals' reports was minimised by the fact that interviewees had also been observed in the natural setting of the gym prior to the conversations and could be referring back to practices of theirs that were not completely unknown to me from that phase (see, also Blaikie, 2000: 192; Hammersley, 2003: 343).

So, the combination of methodologies made the exploration of the main themes of this study easier, as did the fact that interviewees were also given the opportunity to check the interpretations of their narratives at later stages in the study, in more or less formal discussions.

Briefly, then, the main problem associated with the interviews was how to design specific questions on the basis of such abstract work as that of Foucault. Locating power as a relation of forces or a heterogeneous ensemble of techniques and practices which lead people to the gym meant that participants had to be asked about all these; the reasons why they exercise; their feelings about exercise; the influences to which they were subjected at the time when they first joined a gym; the meaning that exercise has for them at present and about changes in their attitudes

towards exercise that could have occurred since they first started. Once this was done, the other difficult part was to ask about that further aspect of Foucault's account, about power as written on the body, and, finally to get inside people's everyday language and make a theoretical interpretation of their accounts.

The added questions about people's relationships to their bodies and their perceptions of their own bodies and the talk about the broader social standards and ideals regarding the body would help make this discussion less elusive and abstract. It would make easier the understanding of the capture of the flesh in the mechanisms of power and would show the multiple ways of operation of power as well as its practical, material effects. It would further help show how they body lives and experiences things, it would reveal the bodies' materiality.

But the investigation of this issue (the body and people's ideas of their bodies and of their embodied experiences) was something that needed to be done with care. Otherwise, my calls for the revelation of their personal body stories ran the risk of remaining unanswered. A few examples illustrate this difficulty. On a couple of occasions, interviewees, especially male ones, admitted to feeling nervous when being asked specific questions or even throughout the interviews:

Here I am pouring my heart out about something so private like my relationship to my body to somebody I only know for a short while,

Jonathan said, whereas Bruce only agreed to sign the consent form⁸⁴ for the participation in the study after the interview was over and he had thus heard all the questions that I had to pose. "I answered all of them honestly", he said in the end, "but there was nothing in there after all that would make me not want to answer". One can only speculate about this but an additional reason for his nervousness could have been the fact that the researcher is a woman⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ See, Appendix C.

⁸⁵ See also, Burgess, 1991: 105. Additionally, Grogan and Richards, 2002: 222, where authors illustrate how men generally feel more nervous talking about their bodies but men in focus groups – larger and more 'impersonal' groups – felt better in revealing their perceptions about their bodies to female facilitators. Lee (1995: 100), on the other hand, discusses how women prefer to be interviewed by female interviewers.

For other participants the difficulty lay not only in the fact that a private matter such as their relationships to their bodies was being investigated, but also that going to the gym is something that they do ‘routinely’ – it is an effect of such power that they exercise *mechanically* upon their flesh. It is something that they do which they take for granted and, of course, do not think of sociologically. Articulating this experience (or as one would say in more scientific language, interviewees being ‘reflexive’, having thought of their habit to exercise more deeply and consciously) was then also an issue. One of the respondents admitted: “I mean, I know why I do it and how I feel about it but putting my feelings into words has not been easy”⁸⁶.

As regarding the investigation of social standards, an extra cause for alert was the suspicion that interviewees would probably not have been ready to admit that they are subjected to broader social influences when doing whatever they do or that they would not have been able to acknowledge or describe how they experience the effects of such diffuse, social, mechanically exercised power upon themselves. However, this turned out not to be the case. Although “I do it for myself” was a phrase that usually opened their narratives, soon after participants admitted the influences of society or of particular social groups to which they belong on their decisions to join a gym. Comments like: “I am doing it because I want to be accepted” or “it’s very much a peer pressure issue. People feel they need to go because everyone is doing it” were frequent in the responses of both men and women and signified that people were indeed influenced by broader social forces when deciding to treat their bodies in certain ways. These remarks would further show, as Foucault would say, how power runs across the whole social field and informs individual choices through people’s interactions with others. Statements like these also revealed, though, how the impact of all interactions, all social relations is effectively written upon our flesh.

⁸⁶ See, Adkins on the meaning of reflexivity as a practice that entails “understanding of unthought categories [of habit] and shared meanings” (2003: 25). As she argues, social actors most often “operate below the level of consciousness and language through ‘a feel for the game’” (2003: 24). The feel for the game, she continues, is a form of knowledge which “often cannot be explicitly articulated”. A similar view is expressed in Halford (2004: 3.1), where the author confirms that in many research occasions “[m]eanings are hard to elicit [because it is] hard for individuals to untangle from the habitual routines of everyday life”.

Let me now talk a bit more about some practical aspects of conducting the interviews which further reflect the inherent (practical and more abstract) difficulties of conducting research on Foucault and the body.

4.5.3. The Interview Environment and Other Related Issues

Interviews were conducted in various venues; in offices, on the premises of the gym, in cafes and so on. Because of the perceived sensitivity of the topic, the body, I thought that I should let interviewees choose a place of their liking or convenience to meet and discuss these matters, so that they would not feel uncomfortable or insecure about the process in any other way and would be more talkative and revealing⁸⁷. Of course, this created some technical problems, particularly for instance when interviews took place in cafes where, in spite of the efforts to choose the quietest place to hold the conversations, the environment was still noisy. This often meant that the transcription was more difficult and took longer but what mattered most was that the interviewees felt relaxed.

Most conversations lasted about one and a half hours.

Interviews were tape-recorded. To reduce the ‘detrimental’ effects that tape-recording has, like the ‘distraction’ of the interviewees by the presence of the machine or the awkwardness they could feel because of the machine (see, Speer and Hutchby, 2003: 316; contra, Hammersley, 2003: 343), and further make them feel relaxed and ‘natural’, but also in order to thank them for participating in my study, I would provide cookies, snacks, beverages and soft drinks; particularly when the interviews were taking place at my office, my home, or in some room in the gym that I would have booked for the purpose.

All conversations were transcribed shortly after they had been conducted. This was considered more practical, especially in cases where interviews took place at less quiet venues. The passage of time might have made it more difficult to discern

⁸⁷ On the discussion of sensitive topics in an environment that the interviewee finds comfortable, see also, Drummond (1994).

respondents' words from other sounds; transcription was easier when discussions were still fresh in the memory. A further benefit of doing so was that all impressions and ideas from each discussion were still vivid, enhancing the quality of the material that would come to be later more extensively analysed. It constituted useful contextual information.

In my interviews diary I kept comments and reflections on what could have been done better or what should be avoided in the future. In addition, I included valuations of my performance as an interviewer. All these I thoroughly studied at the stage of the analysis not only in order to explore Foucault's accounts and the gym culture itself but also in order to see my performance as an interviewer might have affected interviewees' reactions and the interpretation of the material, overall⁸⁸.

4.6. The Participants

There are two broad categories of participants in my study. The first ones were those who had a relation with the gym and were familiar with the practice of exercise. The others were friends of mine, outsiders to gym culture from the time when I was also an outsider to this environment and with whom I was often involved in informal conversations about the project. Discussing the progress of my work with this group of people has been just as useful as talking to those who were involved in training. The significance of their contribution lay in the fact that they kept reminding me of the different perceptions, views and attitudes towards the body that always existed and about exercise, which I had also happened to express several times in the past and which I tended to forget as I was starting to become too much of an insider to the experience. Because they were close friends, and because they knew quite well what I was doing, these people could also be more critical than others when I was making methodological choices that were not correct. On the other hand they were encouraging in times of difficulty and supportive overall. It was uplifting hearing them confirm, for instance, when I said how I never expected that

⁸⁸ For a discussion on how interviewers' behaviour might affect interviewees' responses, see Drummond (1994).

people that I did not know well before would come and reveal their stories and problems and concerns about their bodies to me⁸⁹, that “of course, they would. Exercise is something they enjoy so much and it’s good for them to have someone to talk to about it”⁹⁰. It was also useful when they offered their views about questions that I asked and how I could possibly rephrase them.

As far as my informants from the gym were concerned, the original plan was to talk only to users of the facilities. In the process I realised that it would probably be better to talk with members of the programme development team, the managerial staff and with instructors – in order to investigate their beliefs as well as the aims that inspire the overall design of the various training courses.

I shall now introduce the participants in my study. By participants, here, I mean the people from the gym and not those with whom I had informal conversations.

The majority of my interviewees I drew from the OLYMPICO although, eventually, as I have mentioned (section 4.4.), I used people from the UNIVERSAL who were not only students (undergraduate or postgraduate) but members of their families or members of the academic and non-academic staff of the university. Some of the students I talked to, in fact, only attended the OLYMPICO.

As I will be presenting the interviewees, I will also give a few details about their lives and about the way in which I came to be acquainted to them. I am also going to present briefly their opinions and the reasons why each one exercises. I think this will help later to make better sense of and appreciate what they say about the forces that drive them to the gym. But also their attitudes during our first encounters will help further illuminate some of the difficulties (practical and theoretical – as already presented) associated with carrying out qualitative research and further with doing a study about the body and people’s understandings of their bodies.

⁸⁹ “Was it really reasonable to assume that these people, or any others, would at the sight of a [researcher], spill their secrets, revealing their deepest contradictions?” had been Klein’s concern, when he did his own study on the subculture of bodybuilding (1993: 29). I had similar worries, when I started this project.

⁹⁰ On respondents regarding the interview as a luxury when they talk about themselves to an interested listener, see Josselson: 1996, 66; Vickers, 2002: 617. See also Tillmann-Healy, on people having the opportunity to talk about things that they enjoy to someone who cares about what they are doing (2003: 243).

I am going to present the interviewees in the order in which I interviewed them rather than the order in which I met them. As a result there might be a few chronological lapses or discontinuities. To protect the participants' privacy as much as possible, I have changed all their names into pseudonyms. The ages recorded are those at the time of the interviews.

Luke is a 20-year-old archaeology student, from an upper-middle class background, who went to boarding school. He acknowledges that he has had a very privileged upbringing and says that in his school he was 'talked into' sport, although as an overweight child at the time he did not enjoy exercise very much. "You were feeling uncomfortable in that environment, if you weren't ... sporty enough", he narrates. However, he now likes 'being active' and his hobbies include scuba diving, travelling, watching movies and going to the gym. I had seen him a few times at the UNIVERSAL, so when I talked to him about my project, while we were waiting for some piece of equipment to become available in the Nautilus room, he agreed to participate. The interview took place at my office at the university. I offered cookies and tea and we talked for a while about the procedure, made jokes about the tape recording and the 'ice' broke quite easily.

The main reason why Luke goes to the gym now is that it makes him feel 'healthy'. He has lost someone in his close environment from cancer and believes that with exercise he can reduce his chances of getting a disease. He enjoys the bikes, the treadmill and sometimes he does weights, as well. He has only been once to a class – "classes need you to be there at a certain time" and he prefers flexibility. He likes the discipline that the gym provides, and he tells that he can see what he can accomplish or what he has achieved, especially when he uses the cardiovascular machines. However, he does not want to overdo it. He believes that going to the gym is really good and makes one feel better, but cautions against "not going too much". It becomes tiring then and anyway, he adds, there are other ways "to enjoy yourself properly rather than spending all day there, looking at yourself in the mirror".

Sherah, 20 years old, from France, was attending certain courses at the university as an exchange student. She was one of my tutees. She had heard about my project at the beginning of the year and in a kind e-mail later on when she learnt

that I had started the fieldwork, she told me that she could probably be of help, if I needed her. The venue of the interview was the same as before. Sherah is into sport, she is a boxer and a swimmer, and she enjoys cycling and running and doing classic athletics, although she admitted not to use the gym much, particularly since she started her boxing lessons. She trains at the OLYMPICO. Exercise for her is fun, she explains, only when she is “with other people and [we all] learn something together”, rather than when she has to spend some time on her own on a bike or the treadmill. She does not overdo it, though, because “you might be hurt” and she has asthma. She does not consider her condition as serious, though. Exercise for her is “mostly fun”.

Francis is 21 years old and a psychology student. I see her at the UNIVERSAL often and we sort of exchange ‘hello’ nods sometimes. Although I have already started attending the municipal gym and have conducted the pilot interviews I still visit the other venue. I am quite tempted to approach her but not sure how, because I am still at the early stages of the fieldwork. I always leave it for later, awaiting the right moment. What I think makes her an interesting person to talk to, is that I happen to watch her occasionally through the mirror when she is exercising and something in her look makes me feel that she does not really enjoy what she is doing. She seems rather bored and even more, ‘forced’ to be at the gym. The chance for me to speak with her comes towards the end of the period of my attendance at the UNIVERSAL. I arrive at the CV room a bit later than usual (after 4:30 pm) and the place is already crowded. No machines free. She is seated waiting for somebody to get off a stepper or a bike so that she can go. I sit next to her. Everyone seems to be in the middle of their programme and with no intention of leaving soon. So we start chatting. “Busy day, today” and the like begin our conversation. “What is it that you want to do?” follows from her. “Bike probably but everybody seems to be very keen, tonight”, I respond. The conversation goes on for a few minutes and taking confidence from the fact that we have started talking I say to her: “I have seen you here sometimes. And I am doing this project about people who exercise”. I describe the project briefly and she says she finds it interesting, so I conclude, “Would you like to participate in it? I am asking things like what sort of exercise people do, why they do it, how they feel about it.” She kindly agrees and we set a date to meet and do the interview which, I inform her as I do with everybody else, in advance, will be

tape-recorded but she should not worry because her own name will not be used, that I will give her a 'new' one instead. Finally, some people leave the room and we manage to do our exercise for the evening and we meet a few days later again at my office for our conversation. Francis does not seem to have an appearance issue (she is rather tall and slim) but one of the first things she tells me is that she finds exercise good "in terms of keeping [her] weight down". To my question if she thinks she is overweight she responds: "no ..., but I guess everyone to a certain extent wants to look good", associating good looks with a slim physique.

Constance is 28 years old, comes from Australia and is our instructor in one of the most popular evening classes in the OLYMPICO, the Bodystep. The interview takes place at the café, in the gym's foyer. It is luckily only a little noisy, as it is Saturday lunchtime and a sunny, autumn day and most people take advantage of the weather and choose to be outside. There are thus no major problems with recording our conversation. Constance seems full of energy all the time. Coming from a 'musical' family with a very 'active and physical' background, as well, she "sort of put the two (music and action) together", she tells me, becoming an aerobics and fitness instructor. She also teaches swimming and life saving and has additionally specialised in body massage and aromatherapy. Apart from the step class, she also does the Bodypump and Bodycombat (also known as Cardio-Combat) and attends yoga and ballet herself. She says she loves being outside, doing "anything outside: camping, hiking, rock-climbing, abseiling". She tries to give herself at least one day off to do nothing but tends to get "restless". So she will "go out for a walk or do something". She appreciates mostly "the health benefits and the buzz you get from [exercise]". This is why she started training, this is why she carries on and this is what she is aiming for; to be healthy. As an adolescent, she says, she went through a "roller-coaster of anorexia and bulimia". When she was 14, she weighed 33 kilos, "which is practically nothing". Then gradually by reading a lot about food "not just from the 'I don't want to eat' but also from the nutritional point of view" and exercising, as well, she managed to get over the anorexia, although the bulimia stayed for some more years. Finally, she met an old friend of hers who used to be overweight but lost all her extra pounds by eating regularly, even though it may have been only something small. Constance decided that she should get over her

‘unhealthy’ habits and get her life back too. She now admits to being happy with her figure for the most part and even if she has put on a bit of weight lately “it’s not a big drama”.

I met Constance in Bodystep. Parallel to advertising the project in the gym with posters and flyers, having been granted the managers’ permission, I started attending her class regularly hoping to meet the people that could constitute the informants to my study, as this was one of the most popular classes and at one of the peak hours. As I mentioned earlier I was not considering seriously, however, at that stage the idea that I should include instructors in my project, too. I felt that because exercise was these people’s job, it is something that they are paid to do rather than pay to do, I should avoid asking them to take part in my interviews. On the basis that a different kind of dynamics develop within and because of the fact that this is their profession, I would have to have changed the design of my study, in a way that would not help me investigate the issues that I had set out to explore or show the things I had set out to show in the first place. I had therefore refrained from introducing myself to Constance for quite a while as the person who was carrying out this piece of research that was being advertised all around the place. One evening, though, as I was coming out of the class and was thanking her for another session, she stopped me to ask why I never go to the front, particularly since my performance had improved since I first started ‘stepping’ and I clearly no longer looked intimidated and seemed much more confident about the moves. I replied that I would like to but I also revealed that I felt that staying at the back was better for me because I was doing this study and being at the back and opposite the huge mirror on the wall enabled me to observe better what was happening in the class, which was necessary for my project. When she asked me what project, I pointed to the poster on the wall outside the dance room that gave details about my research and also had my contact details and explained a few more things to her about it. Although Constance admitted she had not noticed the poster, she also told me that the whole thing sounded really interesting and asked me if I would want to do an interview with her. I said that I could but that I was also concerned about the fact that she is an instructor and that probably I would have to develop a different set of questions for her case. She replied that I need not because, in any case, she thought she was suitable for the study because wherever she goes,

“no matter where in the world”, she likes to find a gym and exercise, regardless of whether she is given a job as an instructor or not. It seemed quite persuasive an argument and so we arranged for our interview to take place soon. It was indeed conducted the following weekend.

Betty is 26, from Wales, a graduate of history and sociology, who is now working for an advertising agency in Scotland. She used to dance when she was younger. Later, when she reached that age when “it was not cool to dance any more”, she started rowing. She was in the national rowing team. They were the women’s champions in 1992. Exercise has always been a part of her life in some form, she tells me, and when she moved here she decided to join the municipal gym and continue her “fitness” training. So she described it. Exercise, she says, is something she enjoys, anyway, and also helps her to lose weight and tone up.

We would be among the first ones to arrive for the step-class usually and thus we had some time to chat before it began. In one of these encounters, I told her about the project and asked her if she would like to participate. She agreed. The interview was conducted in one of the rooms in the premises of the gym that I had booked for the purpose. The room was quiet and therefore the recording was very clear and because we were in this room alone, I think my respondent talked on the whole rather freely about her experiences. However, there was a moment in this interview that for the first time made me feel really uncomfortable about the process. In the previous discussions, interviewees were talkative, would even answer questions before I even asked them, so to speak, and would not mind repeating comments or returning to their previous comments for clarifications, when they felt necessary or if I prompted them to. In this conversation, my interviewee seemed to be more reluctant to repeat herself or clarify things. I tried on one occasion towards the end, and in order to wind things up, to invite a final comment from her as to whether she thought of exercise as discipline or pleasure. Betty asked me if I thought she was a “psychological nightmare”. She had said before that she sees training ‘mostly as discipline’ but she might have felt that, because I was asking her again, this was not what I expected to hear. Her question in return took me completely by surprise. I rushed to justify that I did not believe that it could be solely the one or the other, as she said, and all I wanted to do by asking the question again was her to sum up her

feelings and ideas rather than me doing it. The incident troubled me for a while afterwards. Betty though seemed to have forgotten it right away. She was asking me about the progress of my work and was saying how she had enjoyed the interview. It troubled me on the other hand because it made me uncertain of whether I should ask this particular ending question. It made me feel that people would ‘resist’ to answer it on the basis that exercise was to them both discipline and pleasure (as Foucault would have also argued). It made me reconsider whether this was a good question. It made me feel that other interviewees, like Betty, might have believed that I might have tried to impose an answer on them by prompting them to give me a clear-cut or monolithic reply⁹¹. This is why I felt Betty reacted like this in the first place. However, in listening to the interview again at the time of the transcription and many more times later on during the analysis phase, I realised that her reaction was not as intense as it had seemed to me to be at first. And the final question had proved to be a good final question after all. In subsequent discussions in fact, this turned out to be one of the questions that interviewees admitted mostly to have enjoyed replying to.

Trevor is a 45 year old art school teacher. He usually attends the Bodypump classes in the OLYMPICO with his partner, Albert. This is where I met them. They also use the rowing machines and treadmills in the gym, do free weights and swim, together. Trevor exercises because he thinks that in this way he is going to avoid ‘getting huge’ when he is older. Exercise is for Trevor a means of preserving his health and looks. But, on the other hand, he has “just this sort of arty, designy thing”. He would not be “too stressed about not going to the gym”, whereas he finds his partner more methodical and sometimes it is because Albert wants to go that he comes along. The conversation with Trevor, as with his partner Albert later on, took place in the same room at the gym that I had booked for the interview with Betty as well.

Albert is 38 years old. He is a civil servant. He started off his career in the catering and food industry and, at the time, because of his job, he put on a lot of

⁹¹ The incident verifies, I think also the power that participants to a project may have, particularly the power over the meaning they attribute to their own words and feelings, the power to complain or negotiate – even in this way – the meaning they attribute to the questions that they are asked. But it also gave me, as a researcher, ideas about how to re-evaluate my work at the time and see how it would be better to ask this question in the subsequent interviews. See analogous discussion in Roulston et al, 2001: 748, 767.

weight and was “very flabby, with no physical shape other than flabby”. But he was also an active member in the gay scene and pressure from his peers forced him to become more conscious about his body and to start exercising regularly. In an interesting manner that points to Foucault’s ideas of self-discipline, self-surveillance and internalisation of norms he said: “I then had in my mind’s eye what I wanted to look like: big shoulders, big chest”. Exercise is for him, primarily, a way of not getting ‘too big’, not getting ‘too fat’. He added:

In a way, I am quite vain about my appearance. What I am conscious of is like, when you go to these clubs and you take your top off and I want to develop my upper body because that’s what people actually see and, therefore, I am conscious of that.

Bruce is 37, married, with two children. He is a manual worker (in the scaffolding enterprise) but is also a qualified fitness teacher. He worked at the time both at the UNIVERSAL (although I had never met him there) and the OLYMPICO but then he quit the first and took up a post at another gym, whereas he kept his job in the municipal one. He teaches Bodypump and leads the Bodypump clinic (a session running for half an hour before the actual class, where he briefly goes through the basic moves and demonstrates the right techniques to lift the weights). He also does the Boxercise and Bodyattack. I met Bruce for the first time at his clinic. I was not quite sure up to then how to work with weights but I wanted to join the class because it seemed popular and attracted many people, so this very basic induction session seemed ideal for me to attend. Usually there are two or three people who sign up for the clinic before all the knowledgeable regulars of Bodypump arrive but I was lucky enough to have been the only one that day. Hence, I had all the time I needed to learn all about the class, the people who were taking it and Bruce himself and tell him everything about my project. He showed interest in it and was kindly asking every so often about the progress of my work. Although I had asked him right from our very first meeting at the clinic if he would want to participate, he would always refuse. It still seemed to me, however, that he would be a suitable respondent because fitness teaching was not his main job – he was paid for it but it was not his primary source of living, as he said – and, in any case, he was going to the gym not only to instruct others but also to train himself. In fact, it took me a

couple of months to talk him into doing the interview and a lot of reassurance that it was not going to be an 'intrusive' conversation and that he 'would be in control of it' and that he could stop the whole thing any time he wanted if he felt like not answering my questions any more. It turned out later during our conversation that it was the fact that I had told him that my project was about the body (and exercise, of course, but primarily about the body) that made him hesitate to take part, as he could not really imagine what questions I would be asking. However, all turned out well and he encouraged me to go to him and ask him any follow-up questions at any time I wanted, if I had them. The interview took place at our dance-room prior to the programme. This Bruce asked for and I accepted as I did not want him to feel in any way uncomfortable by having the interview in a setting that would not be as 'natural' for him. Bruce's main reason for exercise is fitness. But he also talks about appearance and about how people should treat and construct their bodies in a healthy way.

Lisa is 31 years old. She is married and manages a children's charity shop. She started going to the gym because a friend of hers who has arthritis said she needed to do something about her condition and Lisa joined her. They went to the gym together for a long time but gradually the habit faded. Then Lisa continued because she has always been "not fat but never been thin". It is her appearance that she is concerned with. However, she exercises not so much because she wants to lose weight but rather because she wants her body to be toned and younger looking. She is now attending two BP classes every week, for the purpose, and uses the machines at the gym once a week. She avoids weights because she does not want to build muscles and finds the BP is enough for strengthening and toning and prefers the exercise bikes and the rowing and step machines. The fact that Lisa believes that with exercise she can look *and* feel younger, is particularly important to her, since her husband is nine years younger than she is.

Diana is 43 years old, a civil servant. She is married and has a young son. She is working part-time so she has enough time to look after her husband and child and, whenever they are at work or at school, respectively, and she is not at work, she likes going to the shops. She is always at the shops in her free time, she says. She loves clothes and she loves fashion. Her love for fashion is reflected in what she chooses to

do in the gym too, she says. She likes attending all the popular classes: “I’ve done aerobics, step, the gym, Bodypump, really anything that comes out every time”. She comes to the gym primarily because she wants to “keep her figure”. She gets disappointed if she happens to arrive at the gym and for some reason the class does not take place, especially if she has arranged for a baby-sitter to look after her son. The time she spends with her son but also the time she spends at the gym are both precious to her so she does not like it when her schedule changes. The interview with Diana took place at a café in town. Diana had picked the venue and again I wanted her to feel comfortable, much as I doubted that recording would be easy because of the noise. The only thing I asked, which she agreed with, was to start as early as we could in the morning when it would not be very crowded, as most people would be at work. During the first half hour, the environment was indeed very quiet and it was easy to record. However, as time went by more and more people started to come in and the process was becoming more difficult. Given the circumstances under which the discussion was conducted, I chose to transcribe the interview as soon as I returned home and all answers were still vivid in my mind too. I realised listening to the tape again at the time of the data analysis that it would have been impossible for me to do a good transcription if I had left it until later. The background noise seemed so much louder that it would have been impossible for me to actually listen clearly to the conversation.

Diana was probably the only person who was nervous throughout the interview, surprisingly even more when we were reaching the final stages. It was not the questions themselves, she told me, but she was really concerned about whether she had told me “what I wanted to hear”. I told her again, as I had done prior to our conversation that I did not want to hear specific things. Besides I could not have expected my interviewees to have read Foucault or studied feminist literature and understand or share fully my research aims and objectives.

Maria is from Cyprus. She is a 26 year old postgraduate student. She does a PhD on the notion of the body in feminist theory and contemporary literature. So my research, because of its relevance as a study of the body, attracted her attention immediately and it did not take her long to agree to take part in my interviews. Maria is a friend of mine that used to go to the university gym frequently, long before I ever

thought of doing a project there. Now, at the time of our conversation, she has moved to a neighbourhood further away and does not visit the venue as often; only a couple of times a week. She has made a programme for herself though, which she follows every other evening at home. "It's a combination of floor exercises and stretching really, just to keep my muscles going". Maria is one of the few people who admits early on in our conversation that she does not think of going to the gym as a hobby. For her it is clearly an "obligation", something she has to do. In the gym, whenever she goes now, she attends, as she used to, the step and circuit classes and uses the treadmills and the elliptical stair-master, because she thinks these exercises are best for her legs, which she does not like. She thinks they are 'fat'.

Maria, influenced by her own work, talks a lot about body image and bodies as 'being' or 'becoming' projects. The language used in this interview often becomes very 'formal'. The discussion lasts longer than any other, around two and a half hours. Maria believes that exercise helps her improve her appearance. The interview takes place at my home.

Ulrike is 24. She is from Sweden. She is doing a degree in politics. Before coming to university she took about a year and a half and travelled and worked around the world. She started going to the gym when she was 14 or 15, with her friends. She wanted to "get in shape" and "lose some weight" and because she was going with friends, the whole thing was much easier. Nowadays she is going to the gym because for her exercise is primarily a stress release and it is fun too. Ulrike attends the circuit classes because "this is basically good all around exercise", and the step and aerobics classes. She finds it difficult to motivate herself to use the machines, "because [she] needs somebody to tell [her] what to do" and so she prefers exercising in a group. This conversation, too, is held in my flat.

Barbara is 29 years old. She dropped her communication studies a few years ago because she found her degree boring. She is also a trained make-up artist. She worked for several years in London for two international film companies and for an advertising agency and is now doing volunteer work (at Lisa's children's shop) and also works part-time at a costume jewellery shop. She has always liked exercise, she used to be a figure skater and a ballet dancer, and she often goes hiking with her dad. In London, she went to the gym because it was "quite fancy". In the gym here, she

attends the BP (which is where I met her with Lisa) and the Ab-Attack (a class that promises to be the “fastest way to get a six-pack”) and spends some time on the bike and lifts weights. Just like Ulrike, she finds that in the classes she has motivation. Exercise for her primarily means “getting fitter”, as in getting stamina and getting firmer but is also a strong anti-depressant. She says, “I’ve been through a lot, I had to quit my job”. “It was really demanding and I was getting too tired”, she says at another point. “In the gym I get rid of the anger and things”. The interview with Barbara also takes place at the municipal gym’s foyer on a quiet evening.

Jonathan is 28. He is from Bermuda. He works as a librarian. He got into university in Massachusetts to do a degree in literature but shortly after he decided to take a year out instead and go and work on boats. He went back to university but left it again after two years because he was bored. He went back to working on boats in Miami and then moved to New York and spent a year landscaping in a public estate. He decided to come to Scotland and he is contemplating going back to school again and doing a degree in agriculture or land design this time. Jonathan likes cross-country skiing and diving, although he injured his neck because he “always wanted to look at the water when jumping off the high platforms” and did not keep his head pointed straight down, “so all that water was hitting [his] forehead and snapping [his] head back every time”. He also likes cycling and running and being outside but equally enjoys exercising in the gym. He thinks that exercise will help him to improve his appearance.

The interview takes place at a quiet café where we meet after his day at work. We were the only people there.

Katia comes from Greece. She is a civil servant. She has temporarily left her job in order to do a year’s postgraduate degree here. She is married. Her husband is back in Greece so she visits home quite a lot. She is 32. She attends the OLYMPICO. The gym and exercise, overall, she believes, are re-introducing the missing balance in her life because her job demands that she sits behind a desk all the time and “this is not very healthy”. In addition, she finds attending the various programmes good, because in any case she enjoys eating and drinking and feels that with a bit of exercise she can keep her weight under control. But for Katia the gym is primarily fun. She uses the treadmills, the bikes and the weight machines, she goes to Body-combat, hip-hop

dancing, and fit-ball and also does Pilates at another venue, all of these in a sort of “pick and mix” way. But “no”, she says, she is “not a gym-freak”. The interview with Katia takes place at her student office, just like the one of James that follows.

James is 28, Scottish. He is a postgraduate student. He is a regular to the gym and does running and cycling and a mix of machines and free weights. He also does yoga and kick-boxing and in the past he was into tai chi and martial arts. He wants to develop particularly his upper body strength. He tells me he used to be terribly unfit but exercise has helped him to do whatever he wants much more easily. He admits to leading a hectic life sometimes and, like Katia, he thinks exercise balances that right out for him.

David is the OLYMPICO’S program development manager. He is the person I had to ask for permission in order to advertise and conduct my study in the facilities. He is also the one with whom I would arrange which space in the premises to use, whenever I needed to conduct an interview there. He showed interest in the project right from the start but it was not until the end that I asked him to take part in my study, having developed an extra set of questions regarding the institution’s aims and objectives, the grounds on which the specific training programmes are designed and other related matters that he could answer. At the end, I also posed to him some of the general questions that I would ask the rest of my interviewees, like if he exercises himself and what meaning exercise has for him but given that I was not as well acquainted with him as I was with the other respondents, I avoided asking him more private questions about the body and body image. For him, however, exercise is primarily related to fitness and health. The interview takes place at his office.

Norman is 23 years old. He is from the US and is a postgraduate student in history. Exercising for him means keeping fit, getting faster and stronger. He plays Frisbee twice every week. Three times a week, he goes to the gym. He does mostly free weights and “if [he] is feeling up to it, he is also going for a ten or fifteen-minute run on the treadmill”. He does not attend classes because, just like Luke, he believes they make you be there at a certain time, whereas he likes flexibility. Norman was, like Jonathan and Luke, a “fairly fat kid and rather unfit” in the past. Often, he admits he would have to face the cruelty of other children, who teased him “relentlessly and this had probably something to do with this”, with him desperately

wanting to get in shape. But he avoids excesses. Exercise is for Norman associated with fitness and health. The interview takes place at my office.

Maggie is 37. She has been an athlete since she was 7, a sprinter and hurdler, and she has always been into fitness. She did her “exercise to music course” and became a fitness teacher when she finished school. She is currently doing a degree in health studies and looks after disabled people. Her athletic past has left her with a debilitating back syndrome, something that forced her to stay away from exercise for about 3 years, because she was in pain. Now she is slowly getting back into it and finds she can deal better with her health problem. Exercise helps her “function better” but also maintain a good physique. Maggie admits that she has always been quite slim and muscular because of her past training but now she wants to ‘become more feminine’ but not overweight, she adds immediately. In the gym Maggie does mostly the body toning and body conditioning classes, the Bodypump and ‘Legs, Bums and Tums’. The interview takes place at one of the rooms I book in the OLYMPICO.

Kostas is 31 years old, a lawyer, from Greece, and has a temporary placement at the legal unit of the Scottish parliament. Kostas is very much like Maggie. He, too, used to be an athlete – a runner. He also suffers from a debilitating back problem and therefore he now rarely goes to the gym. But he enjoys swimming. We met for the first time accidentally at a restaurant in town when, as a newcomer to the city, he approached me to ask for some information. Realising that we were from the same country we started talking about how we ended up in Scotland and I spoke to him about my project. He seemed interested and agreed to take part. I met him several times at the swimming pool later on. Kostas has been one of the most reflexive respondents that I spoke to. He had thought deeply about exercise, largely because he misses doing more often something that he did a lot and enjoyed immensely in the past.

Maintaining his health is the main reason for which Kostas exercises. Previously, he admits, he has done it for other reasons beyond this as well, like for looking good and attracting female attention. Now, with a strong sense of accomplishment and self-confidence, after years of studying and working, he is “not seeking for approval or [is] not trying to build up [his] self-esteem through exercise”.

Of course, his appearance is something that concerns him but his health and being able to do the things he wants in the future are much more important for him and have now become his priorities. He is truly annoyed that he suffered such an injury as the result of the ignorance of many of his instructors (who, unlike what happens only in the US, as he informs me, did not even have some basic knowledge of orthopaedic medicine), but he sees himself as an optimistic person overall and acknowledges that things could have been worse and he is happy that he can at least swim, which he enjoys immensely. Still, the gym used to be for Kostas a place where he would spend many hours and so he has a lot of stories to narrate but they all eventually come round to the issue of health. The interview with him also took place at a café.

4.7. The Method of Data Analysis

I will now present the methods that I used for the analysis of the relevant material collected from participant observation and interviews. I include them here as I believe they are part of the whole methodologies section albeit methodologies of a different stage in the process.

The analysis started off and consisted of several careful re-reads of the interview transcripts and field notes and the attempt to code the various categories and topics of discussion as they emanated from this data. The use of computer packages (like NUDIST or ETHNOGRAPH), specially designed for the analysis of ethnographic and qualitative research material, was avoided because, although I felt that they could significantly help retrieve a large variety of information and in high speed whenever necessary, they did not give me a full sense of control over the data. In any case, they could not have helped much with the process of coding which had been one of the most challenging parts of the analytical process⁹².

This process of microanalysis (studying the collected material line by line), as Strauss and Corbin call it (1998: 59) – which, it should be said, continued up to the final stages of the drafting of this thesis – has enabled me to discern a number of categories of reasons, of ideals (of forces, of relations of power, as Foucault would

⁹² On the advantages and disadvantages of the use of computer packages, see Coffey et al, 1996: 7.2.

name them) that make people subject their bodies to the ‘treats’ and ‘treatments’ of an institution like the gym. These categories were deciphered from the interviewees’ answers to the questions regarding the whys of exercise and the purpose, meaning and importance of exercise for them. Interviewees admitted that they exercise because they want to be healthy, fit and beautiful, and because they derive pleasure out of the experience of training. These categories, which I will analytically describe in the following chapter, were repeated by interviewees in all conversations; some of these categories were discussed more by some than by others but all categories were mentioned by every participant.

I used different colours in the process to mark each of these ideals as the appeared in the conversations. I also coded a number of other categories of ideas throughout at this stage, for instance: body; control; discipline; ability; productivity; achievement; efficiency; strength; power and resistance that, as I felt, related to Foucault’s work. Other notions and concepts like city life, work ethic, hectic lifestyle and, sometimes, gender would come up in the interviews that I would also note down.

In the next chapter, I show how each of the ‘reasons’ why people exercise has primarily been constructed as an ideal that people feel the need to comply with. Going into an in-depth analysis of each of them provided insights to help me illuminate the multifariousness of power but also the ideas of discipline, resistance and pleasure, as used by Foucault. It further helped me make sense of and better represent and interpret the ideas of the liberation from or transgression of certain social norms, of personal empowerment and of an ethical, ‘non-excessive’ construction of the self, as these have been employed by the French philosopher. These issues I discuss in Chapter 6.

My hypothesis and the main presupposition for the conduct of this empirical study has been that the gym constitutes a venue where the functioning of a variety of force relations or power relations – relations that make use of and write the effects of their operation on the human body, break it down and subject it to regulation – becomes apparent. The gym is, in other words, a disciplinary community in the Foucauldian sense.

I seek specific answers to questions like what power relations are, how people perceive of them, how these relations force people to treat their bodies, what people's rationales are for structuring their bodies in certain ways and why some of these rationales might be more prevalent than others. I talk about individuals' perceptions of their bodies. I present their experiences of discipline and pleasure as these are felt upon their bodies in the course of exercise. I show how their attitudes towards their bodies relate to their opinions about exercise and vice versa. I show how their bodies live the experience of exercise and what exercise enables people's bodies to do. I examine how these narratives match (and the extent to which they match) with Foucault's work and his ideas, and whether they reflect what Foucault argues about power operating on the basis of certain technologies that 'shape' the body. I demonstrate how the findings of my study may help cast light on his work. I have already briefly considered some of these issues in the methods chapter. I chose to do so at that point as, in many instances, observation, and the comments that people made during formal or informal conversations on the topic, led me to re-evaluate and change the research design⁹³. It is now time, however, to look more closely at the matters of operation of power in its many forms and talk about discipline and the body. I will examine how, although power targets our minds, it ends up capturing our flesh. I will also demonstrate how power may be resisted through the knowledge people acquire when getting involved with it.

More specifically, in this chapter, I attempt to address the question 'what is power?' Using mostly interviewees' narratives, I record what they identify as the

⁹³ One such example were the questions about people's perceptions of their bodies which were added after the pilot study, when it was understood that they could help with a deeper examination of the issues of how our bodies live the world and how they are captured in the mechanics of power.

main reasons, the forces, which drive them to the gym. Relevant information also appeared in conversations with other people with whom I discussed this issue informally and who are outsiders to the gym culture. Their words I also include at relevant points, because I believe that they reflect some of the broader social perceptions about exercise and the reasons why others choose to exercise. I conclude by trying to illustrate further what kind of body it is that power creates and that contemporary society needs, as Foucault would add (see DP: 28).

5.1. The Multiple Forms of Power

Through the process of microanalysis described in section 4.7., I have managed to discern a number of reasons and influences – the mandates of culture or the relations of power – that make people subject their bodies to treatment in an institution like the gym. Interviewees revealed these reasons in answers to a number of specific questions regarding the whys of exercise and the purpose, meaning and importance that exercise has for them. I shall introduce these reasons in the order in which they appeared in the first few interviews. In different ways and to different extents, they re-appeared several times in the course of all conversations both with gym users and with outsiders to the gym culture.

Participants answered that they use the gym and attend the various programmes mainly for the following reasons⁹⁴:

a) They want to be ‘healthy’. Five of them (Luke, Constance, Trevor, Maggie, Kostas) said that it was primarily for achieving this that they exercise.

b) They want to ‘keep fit’. They provided various interpretations as to what fitness is and how they perceive of ‘being’ and/or ‘keeping fit’. I refer to these interpretations later in this chapter. Six of the interviewees (Betty, Bruce, Barbara, James, David, Norman) referred to the complex idea of fitness as the primary reason and ultimate goal for exercising.

⁹⁴ A similar categorisation, although not identical one may find in the article of Williams and Boden (2004) on sleep. Sleep is being legitimised (and even further capitalised) on the grounds of health, beauty and pleasure, the authors say (1.6.). They further illustrate how health is something that is actively pursued today by most of us in a variety of ways (3.1.) and go on to show – in a rather Foucauldian manner – although without much reference to Foucault – how sleep is being regulated time-wise and in a variety of other ways and discuss what these regulations may serve (4.2., 4.5.).

c) They want to improve their ‘image’ and reach certain standards of beauty (the multiple aspects of which I discuss later). Six of them (Francis, Albert, Lisa, Diana, Maria, Jonathan) prioritised aesthetics and appearance when they came to justify their regular visits to the exercise venue.

d) Exercise for them is purely ‘pleasure’. Three of them (Sherah, Ulrike, Katia) said so and explained why they see exercise mostly as an instantly gratifying experience.

In the course of my microanalysis, it proved helpful, as I have said, to use different colour markings to denote each of the previously referred to reasons why people work out, and different shades to indicate the points of their narratives and of my field notes that reminded me of other concepts and aspects of Foucault’s theory (like discipline, the gaze, excess, knowledge, ethics, freedom and so on). However, in no interview has a single colour been used throughout. On the contrary, each of the transcript pages eventually emerged as a multi-shaded patchwork. This is because all reasons why people exercise, as noted above, and the ways they make sense of discipline were referred to by almost all the interviewees and often appeared as inter-related and similar in their narratives, even though some of these reasons were given different priority by informants. For some, health was much more valued than appearance, whereas for others image was considered a more significant matter in the current phase of their lives. In many instances a variety of colours could also meet in one single quote. This denoted that training individuals acknowledged that they were in fact a variety of forces that make them want to exercise, even though they thought of some of these forces more highly than others. The interviewees’ accounts further seemed to reflect that their choices to exercise were effects of a number of social, ‘cultural’ influences to which they were subjected depending on what broader social groups they identified with or adhered to (be these family, ethnicity, age-groups, the gay community and others), and the ways in which these groups viewed and valued exercise and the treatment of the body overall. Technically, which ideal or reason finally appeared as the dominant one each time depended on the frequency of use of each colour throughout each transcript. This is how I came to make these categorisations.

I will discuss now each of the aforementioned reasons why people exercise (health, fitness, beauty and pleasure) and illustrate how each one of them has been constructed as an ideal which my informants have internalised and with which they feel the need to comply.

5.2. Analysing Health

That the maintenance of health is an important reason for exercising is evident in many comments that both users of the gym and outsiders to the gym culture made. All interviewees, regardless of whether they presented it as their own priority, admitted that health is indeed a significant reason why many choose to use the facilities of a gym and attend the various classes. “I think people do it for health” was a typical answer to the question “why do you think people exercise?”

It is all this about being healthy and active. I, myself, don't go to the gym. I have lots of friends, though, who – even at our age – do go.

This was said to me by an elderly lady (in her 70s) with whom I spoke informally about my project. “All this” in her narrative seems to imply the existence of some kind of broader social concern and awareness around such matters as the acquisition and maintenance of good health through exercise and the prevalence of a type of mandate that demands that we are all ‘healthy and active’.

Constance told me that “it [is] the health/strength benefits” that she is after when she is exercising. Constance, in fact, sees everything associated with exercise as enabling her to keep her health in good condition. She explained that she had been to a “big health convention” recently. This was a convention for the training of fitness instructors, she told me at another point of the conversation, and was aiming at demonstrating to them the latest training programmes. She still characterised it as a ‘health’ convention, because for her exercise and the protection of health are closely related.

Luke, similarly, revealed why he enjoys training and therefore continues to exercise regularly:

It's pleasing and I am conscious of being healthy. I suppose the main aim of the gym is to make you feel healthy and by feeling healthy it makes me feel good and that may not be the reason why I started working out but that's the reason why I carry on.

"Otherwise", he added at another point, "I feel I become unhealthy". Analogously, Kostas (aged 31) said:

Nowadays, feeling good is one of the most important reasons why I exercise. The other one is health and the better appreciation of the ageing of my body. Of course, it's a bit early to talk about it but I know that in the long term, if I keep on exercising systematically and carefully I know I will maintain my health and protect my body. And also, I want to be strong to endure physically. The great lot of exercise that I used to do in the gym I have replaced the last few years with swimming and I know that swimming helps me maintain my body and my health.

Maggie (aged 37) also stated: "I want to be healthy. Now that I am getting older I want to be, to know that I am still healthy". And Ulrike (aged 24) spoke graphically about the long term effects of exercise for one's health:

I guess in a way, thinking about the future, it's important to take care of your body. This is going to sound a bit silly but if you want to live long and have a nice life, you have to take care of your body. I mean, in some respect you have to look at your body as a machine and you have to maintain it, otherwise it's going to break down on you, eventually. So, I guess the long term goal when doing exercise now is to live a long life and a healthier life.

Although it would be difficult to make a generalisation here about who aspires more to maintaining good health through exercise – and this because of the small number of interviews that I conducted – albeit a sufficient one to give me ideas about how to understand better and interpret people's words for the purposes of this study but a small one considered the numbers of people that attend gyms every day – I must say that it was my impression after I had finished reading all the transcripts that those who appreciated and pursued this ideal more, and saw exercise as a means of becoming or keeping healthy, seemed to be people who themselves suffer from serious health problems or people who have had relatives or friends suffering from certain (incurable in many instances) diseases or people who are older. Constance,

Luke, Maggie and Kostas are all relevant examples. Constance has had, as we have seen, what she calls a ‘dramatic’ anorexic past; Luke was bereaved by his relative’s loss from cancer and Maggie and Kostas suffer from painful back conditions. And the elderly woman’s comment at the beginning of this section point to how people of her age aspire to health. Having seen the deterioration of the body and the pain that ageing and ill health cause either to themselves or to others close to them, and wanting to avoid or delay similar experiences in the future, these people exercise because they feel it helps them to maintain or improve their health and the condition of their bodies. With the type of exercise they do they aspire to making their everyday lives less painful or difficult.

On the other hand, people who are younger or have not themselves suffered, or have not had others close to them suffering from such serious illnesses or conditions, are less likely to prioritise health as a reason that supports their choice to exercise. These people, under the ‘pressure of their peers’ as they often admit, often value image and appearance more than health, and often to earn the admiration of others by constructing their bodies according to the existing standards of beauty.

Ironically, it was also interesting to see that many of those who talk about health and aspire to it believe that working out might be damaging for their health on occasions, as I will show later. To conclude this section let me look at the following comment:

I really can’t understand how they say that they exercise because they want to be healthy; especially if people are older. I can’t understand why they have to strain so much. They should stay at home and take it easy, instead.

This comment, from a friend who is an outsider to the gym culture, reveals that there is indeed a widespread perception that many people exercise because they want to maintain their health, but also points to that what it means to be healthy and how good health may be achieved are subjects open to much debate.

Let me now return to the participants’ narratives and attempt to show the more specific meanings that they attribute to the term ‘health’.

5.2.1. *The Meanings of Health and the Impact of Exercise*

The meanings that health has for interviewees are many (see analogously on the various definitions of health, Coward, 1989: 43; Salmon, 1984: 280; Naidoo and Wills, 1994: 3-4, 15; Davey et al, 1993: 26-31). Health for participants in the study has not to do only with not being ill and bed-ridden or being able to avoid and fight off specific illness. It has additionally to do with “feeling good”.

Quoting from the editorial for the health page that *The Guardian* launched in 1988, Coward comments that health “rests on harmony of body, soul and emotion and satisfactory relationships with other people and society as a whole” (1989: 43-44). The newspaper’s emphasis on health and on health perceived as physical and mental but also as indicative of our satisfactory relationships with other people and society seems to hint towards Foucault’s writings and leads us to recalling his remarks on the changing perceptions about health, the significance of people’s health for society as a whole, and the conditions that enabled these changes in perceptions about health as illustrated in THS, vol. 1. (See sections 1.1.2. and 2.2.1.)

We have seen that the French philosopher describes the social changes and technological advances which, as other sociological commentators also demonstrate (see Hier, 2003: 3), create new hope in individuals about life but equally often create problems and make people concerned about the effects of these developments (also section 2.2.1.). Progress in science, for example, creates the impression that many diseases can be cured and that a number of medical questions can be answered but technology and the new modes of living also create new risks for individuals’ health. Life may be becoming better on the whole but it would be fair to argue it is also becoming more stressful, probably more so for those living in bigger towns and cities. People work for long hours and they have to be efficient in their work. How to become better in their jobs preoccupies them and it is not surprising that they often come to suffer from a number of pathological conditions that did not appear as frequently in the past: depression, anxiety, fatigue, insecurities and phobias, for example; all pathologies that distract also the harmony of our relationships with other people (see, also, Coward, 1989: 81; Salmon, 1984: 21, 265; Kleinman, 1984: 144-5).

The interviewees also believe that exercise truly helps them protect both their physical and mental health and, in this sense, guarantees them ‘total’ wellbeing. It helps them minimise the risk of getting specific diseases (like heart disease) and makes up for some already existing debilitating physical conditions (like back pain or arthritis) that would, could or already do prevent them from doing the things they want to. Having good health also helps them *feel* ‘good’, energetic, able to do whatever they wish and maintain peace of mind. The protection of health is thus for interviewees a matter of protection of their minds as well as their bodies. The belief that they can maintain their whole health through exercise is important to them.

More specifically, that exercise works in all these directions is to be seen in that interviewees not only describe training as making their bodies ‘strong(er)’ and able to ‘endure physically’ and even able to ‘live longer’, but also consider it as a stress releasing process, giving people a sense of ‘balance’ in their lives. Many, in fact, describe it as a strong ‘anti-depressant’ (Barbara, Constance). Exercise is a good way of ‘releasing stress and pent up tension’, respondents said, and it thus leads to a ‘relaxation’ of mind and soul. Ulrike saw exercise as a kind of mental ‘therapy’. It is the use of the word ‘therapy’ in this context that I found crucial and I have chosen to include the comment here:

I just go in there and work out and – you know – I just switch off my mind; just switch off. I mean it’s sort of like a therapy, in a way. You just go in there and you let your thoughts just float in your head. ... I think what most people tend to do wrong is that when they are really, really stressed with work, they tend to skip the gym and I think that’s the most stupid thing you can do. Because I find that when I am really, really stressed the best thing for me is to go to the gym for an hour and get all the stress out of my system. ... It’s a stress-release to go in there and just have a good work-out and then you come out and you feel relaxed.

The maintenance of body, mind and psyche in a good condition is also deemed a significant effect of exercise by a number of other participants in the project, especially those who admit to leading an otherwise ‘hectic’ or ‘imbalanced’ lifestyle, like James, Katia and Diana. Their lifestyles often involve ‘a bit too much drinking’ (James), eating a lot or many times during the day (Diana describes herself as a ‘nibbler’), working behind a desk most of the time or using a car which does not

give them the opportunity to walk much. Exercise is a 'healthy' thing to do for these people. It restores the missing equilibrium in their lives, as the relevant literature suggests too (Coward, 1989: 43). James said:

[I]t kind of puts my life back in balance because I do an awful lot of things that are a bit unhealthy for me and exercise just balances that right out. ... When I have a little bit of a hectic weekend every so often, you know, three or four days back in the gym make me start feeling better. I do actually feel healthier when I do it.

Katia would seem to agree. She spends a lot of her time working in front of a computer. She said her life tends to be very "unphysical" otherwise because of this and she admitted that she sometimes feels guilty if she does not make it to the gym, as she does not do much about her health on the whole. She seems to feel she does not comply with a broader imperative to be healthy:

I don't feel I am doing something particularly healthy otherwise. Also, I can drink a lot, I can eat all kinds of stuff and I think I need to compensate somehow for the unhealthy things in my life with a good portion of healthy things.

Similarly, Diana commented:

I don't do a lot of normal walking because of the sort of lifestyle that I have. I use the car quite a lot. And I feel I've got to do something.

Working out additionally makes interviewees feel 'less lethargic', 'less tired', 'less inactive' and consequently less mentally and psychically, but ultimately less physically 'sick', as they frequently comment. "I got sick sometimes, because I was just sitting there doing nothing", said Sherah. Betty similarly reported:

I find I sleep better at night [after exercising] and then I feel better when I get up in the morning. I am not feeling like I want to sleep all day. ... It's just the kind of not feeling tired all the time, you know. ... Not doing things, not being active, makes me tired.

She explained at another point why she hopes the gym and exercise will be a part of her life for as long as she can go:

I don't want to be dying of a heart attack when I am 45 because I am overweight and haven't done the exercise and things like that.

Exercise helps her to avoid developing a heart disease that could be fatal for her when she is older. But again, as we saw previously, it is hoped that training will protect her mental state, too.

Finally, health implies that people are able to create a whole lifestyle that is healthy. Constance said she is “aware of how healthy [people] should be” overall. She explained how she finds that exercise helps her and her body achieve health, how it enables her to do whatever physical activity she wishes and allows her to continue to lead a healthy lifestyle. It is like a circle. She responded as follows to a question about why she exercises:

It's purely a strength-health benefit. It's being strong enough to maintain my body in a healthy way, so, if I want to go out for a long walk, I can go out for a long walk. I know my legs are going to carry me and my heart is going to take it.

Health and strength seem to be given a similar meaning in this narrative. Health means building her muscles (legs and heart) up to be strong. “It is protection”, she said at another point, it is to do with “conditioning everything around your body, your muscles, [it is] being strong enough to protect your body”, so that she can do what she wishes. Health implies, then, something more than not being ill, physically or psychically. It has to do with treating one's body in a healthy way, too. Along similar lines, Ulrike said:

I think people are somehow bound to live healthy when they go to the gym. I mean, don't imagine that anyone would come back from training and would start drinking or eating an awfully insensible diet or overdoing it on the whole.

That health and maintaining it are really significant is something that becomes apparent not only from participants' affirmations and their immediate

responses to questions regarding the reasons why they exercise but also from those parts of their narratives where they describe 'bad experiences' associated with the practice of exercise or where they reveal what would, could or has stopped them from exercising. In these narratives, one may identify again the variant meanings of health.

"Ill health" is a reason why many of them stop exercising for shorter or longer periods of time. This they do in order to protect themselves from getting worse. The majority of interviewees agree, as instructors often also advise, that one should not exercise when ill or 'really unwell' (when their back hurts, for example, or when they have a viral infection, a cold or something of the kind). Their immune system, many often say, is weak and they are unable to do specific exercises and it usually takes a while before they fully recover. They feel one should avoid straining oneself until completely well, distressful as this may be (Betty says she feels 'rubbish' after a while) for all those who find pleasure in training, because otherwise the risk of staying out of the gym for longer is much higher. For the protection of health people feel it is good to stop exercising for a while then, even if it makes them feel that when they get back they will have to start all over again before they reach the level that they were at.

On the other hand, injuries and the risk of harming themselves because of rigorous exercise is what most defined as 'bad experiences'. This revealed further how much they care for their health. In all cases I will describe, it is apparent how highly people think of health and of being healthy, and how they fear the further disruption of the harmony between the body and soul that would often result from one's inability to attend the gym for a long period of time after an injury. Maggie said: "bad experiences I had when I was younger ... I had a lot of bad injury". "This is why I stayed away from the gym before because I was in so much pain", she remembers sadly. Betty also said: "Injury" – that could stop her from exercising. And the time it would take for me to recover would be really long". Norman also described a bad experience:

Hmm ... Bad experience? ... I was lifting weights ..., my own partner wasn't there, I was lifting alone and I asked a guy for a spot; you know, to spot how I was doing the normal bench press. So, I lifted the weight and you have to reach all the way back and then hold the

weight like this [shows how] and I asked the guy for a spot and told him: 'this is pretty heavy for me so I am going to need you to help me lift it up so that I can balance it right', get it in that position that I needed. He was like: 'oh, ok'. But he really didn't give me a full spot, so my arms went back and I couldn't support it quite yet and he let go and I was off balance, the bar was behind me and I was like: 'oh, God!' and I heard something snap in my shoulder, it didn't hurt, I just heard it snap and you know that's an alarming sound when you are lifting weights – you hear something go like this and you're like: 'better stop now or else I am going to hurt myself'. And I was like: 'grab it, quick!' and he just picked it up and started to walk off. The guy didn't exactly know what spotting was. And he was like 'oh, sorry' and he helped to get it off me and I set the weight down and got up and was like 'man, you have to be careful', I just wanted to smack him, really. 'You idiot, have you ever spotted anybody before? Do you even know what you are doing? I could have ...' because I could have seriously injured myself.

Norman's last comment was so passionate that it made me feel that he feared a lot more than a temporary 'snap' in his shoulder, something that could leave him with debilitating problem as serious as Kostas's or Maggie's.

Because of this fear of hurting themselves, people revealed that they try to avoid excesses when exercising. This signified again the importance that health had for them but it was also another way to reveal the various and variant meanings that health takes. These people acknowledged, for instance, the dangers that intensive training which happens 'not in moderation' has for their health. They find that doing exercise in an 'aggressive' manner has an 'unhealthy' effect for their bodies, and is 'unhealthy' as an attitude towards their existence on the whole. For them protecting their health through exercise means also that exercise has to be done in a non-excessive way. (See also, Sherah's comment in section 4.6.).

Good health, participants seem to suggest rather tautologically, can only be achieved through training in the gym, only if it is done in a 'healthy manner'. This also implies, for many, that additional burdens are not to be put on the body with supplements and other chemical substances but that the body is, instead, 'nourished well and healthily' ('with vegetables and fish', for instance), as it is subjected to moderate exercise. All else implies excess, as I will show in the following chapter, and leads to a breakdown of the disciplinary process.

Jonathan said when asked to describe the way he exercises and whether he knows his limits with regard to exercise: “moderately ... I’d like to avoid injury really. One of the reasons that I go to the gym is because my neck bothers me” (again we have the case of a health problem that occurred after careless diving which exercise is expected to cure or stabilise) “and I think that when I am exercising, that helps me a bit”. David also turned our attention to that:

You have to have in mind the downsides of rigorous exercise for health. I mean, we say we exercise because we want to be healthy. But I have been to the hospital several times already because I exercise rather aggressively. If I hadn’t been doing that, I wouldn’t have ended up there.

David, apart from holding a managerial position in the gym, is also a professional football player. Training for playing in top league games and actually playing in a game of the kind can be extremely demanding and sometimes even detrimental for his health. He saw even temporary physical injury as a matter not only of fitness (that he will not be able to perform well in the particular sport; this is what fitness means to him, as I will show) but, even more, of health. Kostas analogously argued that exercising intensively can “undermine [people’s] health, even their ability to walk or be independent in the future”. This is especially true for athletes, he says.

All previous narratives give us information about how interviewees perceive health. As I have shown so far, health has not only to do with maintaining one’s physical condition (fighting disease, avoiding injury, protecting oneself against injury) but also with preserving one’s mental and emotional state (with feeling good, active and full of energy instead). It is even further to do with longevity. I have also illustrated, though, that maintaining good health implies additionally the existence of a whole attitude towards exercise and the body – the existence of a ‘healthy’ attitude towards exercise and the body.

However, one more thing might be worth noticing. One may detect that the meaning of good health and what people think helps them acquire good health remain ambivalent on occasions. Interviewees seem to admit that they do not know if

what they do actually is a healthy thing to do. Ulrike's earlier comment implies that different opinions exist as to if people should go to the gym when stressed, or feel unwell, and is indicative of this. One may claim, then, and this is of more relevance to Foucault as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, that the variety of meanings and interpretations of health only appear in the course of the active pursuit of the ideal. It is so that people come to realise how a force relation such as health may be formulated and how many meanings it may acquire and it is because of this that they are able to negotiate these meanings themselves and resist the imperative to one extent or another.

5.2.2. The Ideal of Health and its Proliferation: Health as Discipline in the Foucauldian Sense

I want now to take a closer look at how health has come to be established as an ideal and has penetrated the whole of our societies; how it catches up the individual and disciplines first one's mind and then the body. I want to look at how it appears as a responsibility that one is expected to take and a norm that one is called to comply with by various means.

As Foucault informs us in the first volume of THS, the 18th century was characterised by the interference of the medical profession in the sexual lives of Western European populations (THS, vol. 1: 9, 24, 73). I have already explained what the social conditions were at the time, how knowledge had advanced and how progress enabled doctors and other scientists to interfere with individuals' private spheres (section 1.1.2.). Because of these conditions and this interference, since the 18th century 'health', in parallel to and as related with sex and peoples' sexualities, has become an object of power (see also, THS, vol. 1: 98; DP: 172) and has come to be positioned high in society's list of values (THS, vol. 1: 36, 55, 116, 123). Health became an ideal and its maintenance a political aim (THS, vol. 1: 142, 145; also, Powell, 2002). It was understood that the healthier people were, the more they could offer to the new political and economic order and the communities to which they belonged.

In this context, the promotion of good health was highly advertised and a number of newly established institutions made it their purpose to serve this ideal for the benefit of all. Among these institutions, was the closed gymnasium (see, again, Eichberg, 1998: 62).

That this is indeed so, and that the gym is an institution which has as one of its main aims the promotion of health, is apparent often from the leaflets that promote the various training programmes and which emphasise the importance of exercise for the protection of health. In the newsletters that advertise these activities one may often read: “This time customers are able to dance themselves *to good health* with the launch of [XXX]” (added emphasis). Many of these programmes are, in fact, characterised as ‘health’ ones.

Let me now show how health and its protection are also promoted as ideals or imperatives by a number of other institutions – not just the gym. Let us also see more clearly how in this context, of promotion of health as an ideal, exercise becomes a good means of acquiring health. Furthermore let us see how exercise becomes a technique of power in that it enables people to believe that they can actually control their health.

Like some interviewees, Coward refers to the broader media influences on the construction of the ideal of health. She says, reminding us of the similar discussion on the promotion of beauty by the media that I referred to extensively in Chapter 3:

We are bombarded in the press ... with information about how to look after our health and the importance of doing so (Coward, 1989: 13).

The author continues by arguing that:

It is hard to avoid the implication that health has taken over from sex as the main area of personal self-determination (Coward, 1989: 13).

A number of participants’ accounts illustrate precisely this bombardment that we fall subject to about how to exercise in order to maintain good health and what to do in order to be and stay healthy overall. Albert argued:

I think here in Scotland of all the places that I have ever lived, there tends to be a media-awareness on heart-disease like ‘look after your heart, look after your health’ because, obviously, Scotland is not one of the leading authorities on healthy eating. ... So, I think there tends to be a lot more media drive on, you know, fitness and health. And obviously, the more you are bombarded with it, you tend to practise it more.⁹⁵

So eventually, he said, all this “becomes a state of mind. Fitness and health become a state of mind”. This statement reminds us further of Foucault’s comment that the target of all social forces are our minds; that it is our minds that need to be controlled. And our bodies come to be treated accordingly afterwards.

Because of the emphasis put on health, because of health’s high positioning in society’s value list, exercise is acknowledged as a significant technique of reaching this objective, of meeting the ideal of health. Within the context of ‘problematization of health’ that has been occurring, as Foucault says, since the 18th century, exercise is viewed as a method of ‘maximising’ the forces of life (THS, vol. 1: 122), as a way of enhancing the quality but also the duration of life. But what is important for us to note here is that exercise is a technique created and deployed by power, by the specific force-relation of health itself and which maintains further the proliferation of the ideal (THS, vol. 1: 98). In other words people go to the gym because they are told that doing so will help them acquire good health. What is more, by going to the gym they re-establish the ideal of health and the debate on the necessity to exercise for health. They reproduce the ideal, the debate on health and on what is healthy and what is not.

⁹⁵ One could ask whether this concern about health and the characterisation and advertising of programmes as health-aiming ones is typical only of the municipal gym, which as I shall illustrate shortly is supported and ‘influenced’ by the city council, and which in any case finds itself in a country that does not claim to be an ‘authority’ on healthy living, as interviewees often put it. One could ask whether the management of the gym, under the instruction of the city council, is expected to place special emphasis on issues such as health and try to make people more aware of matters related to health. It would be difficult, of course, to say with accuracy what happens in other countries. However, scholarly work shows that health is a matter that many people in developed countries are concerned about (Sassatelli, 2000: 398). It would be additionally wrong, in my view, to argue that the concern about health is something that only users of the municipal gym would be more prone to express. Actually many of the participants to the study who have referred to the maintenance of good health as a reason for going to the gym are not making use of the OLYMPICO only neither are they all only Scottish. Besides, that helping people to acquire good health through exercise is not only the aim of the municipal gym is proven by the fact that almost any sports and exercise club in town

That exercise is an effect of the force relation of health and a means of controlling the population's health within the context that Foucault describes in THS (vol. 1: 32, 93, 105) becomes further evident in the fact that a number of health *specialists* play a significant role in the design of specific exercise programmes, and that other state-authorities often show their interest and concern about the design, character and aims of these programmes as well. Constance informed us:

The Body Training Systems – which is the Bodypump, Bodystep, Bodycombat – is all tried and tested. It's doctors, physiologists, exercise gurus, health people, physiotherapists, they all sit down and write these programmes.⁹⁶

By arguing that medical professionals 'sit down and write the programmes', Constance obviously does not mean that these people purposefully impose on us the responsibility to care about our health or that they possess the power to do so. On the contrary, what she seems to say, in a rather Foucauldian manner, is that these professionals are subjected to power themselves and are called on to provide their knowledges in a time when power demands that we, each and all, care about our health and in a time when knowledge about health and about how to acquire it has progressed. Now that health proliferates as an ideal, in times when it has become necessary that we all look after our health and people know more about life (sections 5.2. and 5.2.1.), a wide range of specialists are called to contribute to the further development of health and of a healthy attitude towards our bodies, by having a say in the design of these programmes that aim at helping us to acquire good health. But we also see that even the people who are responsible for the design of such programmes are not what we could call 'people in charge', people in power. They do not have the power to force us to the gym but may administer the operation of the force relation of health by providing us with essential information as to how to achieve health by exercising in the gym (also, Nettleton, 1997: 216).

promote their activities as aiming at health. "Health and Beauty Spa", "Health and Fitness Centre" are some of the most typical advertisements of these venues.

⁹⁶ Salmon also illustrates that "maintaining and enhancing one's health has become a primary pursuit of people involved in nutrition, fitness, 'lifestyle' adjustments and a variety of spiritual practices" (1984: 7).

David revealed this when talking about the objectives of the OLYMPICO'S administration:

I think it is part of our vision to get people the support to get started and stay active. So the development of the various programmes helps, it supports and helps people to lead a healthy lifestyle.

His words (the use of verbs such as 'helps' and 'supports') seem to denote that people are not forced by anyone specifically to attend a gym. Instead his language points to the fact of the existence of a broader imperative that influences the gym's administration in their aims and the design of specific programmes by them. David talked about these broader influences that the administration has but also about the feedback that they provide to other political authorities on issues like health⁹⁷:

A: We are an independent trust that manage all the facilities for the local council.

Q: So, are you under the council's supervision or what? Are you influenced by them in any way when developing your programmes?

A: We are influenced by them, yes; because obviously they give us a grant to run the facilities. So yes, we are influenced from them but that's more like an indirect influence. They will encourage us and ask us to make the best offers to health-support and national aims and objectives and strategies and things like that.

The preceding analysis indicates, in accordance with Foucault, that health constitutes an ideal, a relation of power, 'a state of mind' which has a disciplining effect on the whole population, an effect which becomes more obvious in the case of exercising individuals and leaves its signature on their bodies.

In the context of the proliferation of health, people have gradually learnt to take care of their health on their own. Because of all social changes, health in

⁹⁷ Some research, on the other hand, has shown that "[a] supportive physical and policy environment [has not always been] associated with participation in physical activity as strongly as anticipated." "The strongest independent predictor of being physically active was social environment. Those who perceived low social support from their personal environment (i.e. family, friends, school and workplace) were more than twice as likely to be sedentary compared to those who reported high social support from their social environment." (Stahl et al, 2001: 1). Yet, these findings may help indicate precisely the absence of any specific authority that acts as disciplinarian or has 'the power' to determine our choices regarding what lifestyle to lead and confirms Foucault's arguments about the dispersal of power (the power to control one's health in this case) across the whole of society and to everyone.

contemporary societies is no longer viewed as a mere biological or psychological condition that one does not have the means to control. Rather, it has come to be seen as something that one can and must take control of, as a member of a society that acknowledges and appreciates the value and contribution of health to the maximisation of people's forces. People are urged with the help of medical professionals and other specialists to look after their health and subject their bodies to a number of disciplines, such as exercise (also, Taylor, 1984: 199).

Health is, therefore, something one can and must learn to administer, construct and maintain on one's own in any way (THS, vol. 1: 26). It is an aim that one should strive for, an aspiration, even a responsibility. The pursuit and maintenance of good health becomes *de rigueur* for social development, a necessity, a standard: ultimately, a norm (THS, vol. 1: 144). It rules our individual lives but is also re-constructed as a notion by the way in which we lead our lives. In this context "the sense of good health as an optimum state of well being which prevails now ... is not in the hands of the doctor but our own responsibility" (Coward, 1989: 2; also, Lorber, 1997: 10; Salmon, 1984: 252).

However, by having to practise and regulate their health, people also acquire a wide range of knowledges about health itself about what is healthy to do and what not. At this same time, then, an "increase of the knowledgeability of the lay public" on matters of health may be observed, which is a consequence of the development of knowledge on all fields of social activity (Kumar, 2003: 5.11). Individuals are left to pursue good health on their own, experimenting with various practices, one of which may be training in the gym.

Let us now turn to see how people perceive of health as a force relation in the Foucauldian sense (as a disciplinary force), in spite of the fact that many of them do not know of Foucault. Let us see how they acknowledge the necessity of caring for their health (in its multifacetedness) on their own and how this acknowledgement affects the ways they treat their bodies and subjects them to certain forms of discipline in the gym. Luke's tale reveals elements of discipline in people exercising for health's sake (namely of a relation of power creating and setting in action its own mechanics of which exercise is one; see, analogously DP: 137):

There is this sort of 'you do have to do it' and you do feel that you are backing up against illness. You do feel healthy. I lost someone 3 years ago from cancer and looking back I realised that they hadn't done anything to reduce their chance. And I just thought one may as well reduce chance by doing things that make one feel better. ... I do try to eat healthy ... and by going to the gym and eating healthy, I feel I am doing something for not getting ill. They might say in 10 years time that it does nothing but, you know...

He added, later on in our conversation:

I suppose that the gym may reflect what the people and the media think is healthy but, having done what they said, I do feel healthier, too. I suppose, it's like a placebo. But then again, there is always something else to read in the paper or see in the media. It's like GM food, how apparently it's bad and stuff.

What is important here is that Luke shows how health may be promoted as an ideal, how it is perceived as a mandate, even if people might not actually know whether what they are doing is healthy or not. The fact that Luke believes that his relative did nothing to reduce the chances of getting a disease as serious as cancer, and the fact that he says that 'people and the media' dictate that exercise is something healthy, points to the dispersal of the ideal of health across the whole of society and to the fact that it has become an aim widely appreciated. It illustrates further that everybody should feel they must do something about maintaining their health.

That health and its pursuit has become for most people a 'set of mind' (developed in the context of the carceral continuum), as Albert also told me, and that having good health is perceived as the norm that everyone should strive for and subject one's body to various regimes and disciplines in order to achieve, is evident also from the following quotes. Along similar lines to Luke, Trevor explained:

I come to the gym because I don't want to be absolutely dragged down to be huge and die of a heart attack before I am 60. Because my father died of a heart attack and his 2 brothers died of a heart attack. So, when that happened, I went to have my blood checked and my liver checked and everything is fine but I just felt that exercise will keep things like that.

Trevor's rush to 'get everything checked' and his expectation or hope that exercise will prove beneficial for his constitution, just like Luke's anger about the relative's

‘choice’ to do nothing to reduce the chance of getting cancer, point exactly to the fact that health has become an aim for each individual to pursue. In other words, the power to control one’s health has become dispersed to each individual who now has an obligation to look after it in any way they can.

James was also quite clear on how health is a social ideal and mandate that everyone has to follow. He responded to the question: “why do you think people go to the gym?” in this manner:

You’ve got this kind of practical goals, that – you know – society kind of enforces on you, like it’s good doing exercise, especially if you do something like what I am doing, which is office-based all the time, you just don’t get enough exercise and so, if you don’t make an effort to go to the gym, it could be weeks before you walk your length near it and it’s not particularly good ... because [exercise] is deemed as a good thing to do.

He clearly talks about goals that society *enforces* on people, thus reminding us of Foucault’s remarks on the inherent sociality of force relations which influence our behaviour and practices, relations that none of us can escape. But his words also indicate that people are often much more aware of the influences that society exercises upon them than we actually believe; that they acknowledge the (socially imposed) necessity of having to do a lot for their health.

It would not be unfair to argue then that health is clearly a force relation in a Foucauldian sense; its pursuit is something that controls our minds (it becomes an obligation, a seemingly abstract force) but also leaves its imprints on our bodies (takes a material form) as we take ourselves to the gym and exercise hoping for good health.

I will discuss the effects of discipline on the body in more length later, but let me now show how individuals perceive the healthy body. Let me show what they believe the healthy body should look like but also what they believe constitutes a healthy attitude towards the body. The analysis of the descriptions of the interviewees on this topic enable me further also to link the ideal of health to the other ideals or forces of power noted in the introduction to this chapter and demonstrate how they interrelate.

5.2.3. *The Healthy Body: The Effects of Power as Written on the Flesh*

As we have seen, the healthy body is for most interviewees a body that is not suffering from any specific disease, a body that ‘functions well’. It is also an active body, a non-lethargic one that does not get tired easily. It is a strong body ‘that carries one through life well’ and enables one to perform one’s daily duties without difficulty. This healthy body is maintained by (and is further the effect of) a healthy attitude towards one’s existence; it is the effect of non-excessive (s)training, of healthy dieting, and of the avoidance of the use of supplements for its construction.

Let me now take a closer look at the form, shape and structure of this body as participants in the study described it. Their comments were answers to questions like ‘what is a healthy body for you?’, which often came as a prompt to further questions like “what is a good, nice body for you?” or “what is it that may attract your attention to a person’s body? What is the first thing that you usually notice on other people’s bodies?”

People replied to these questions with words indicating that it was health and a healthy appearance that they appreciated. This is how Maria, for instance, replied to my question “what is a nice body for you?” For her, like for many others, a nice body means precisely a healthy one. A healthy body means further one that has ‘good posture’. Constance told me that good posture is what she notices first on people and it is one of the things she believes is associated directly with or constitutes a clear indication of good health and of the fact that a person leads a healthy lifestyle. Equally, a trained body (a body which is deemed for her to have good posture) is a healthy body. She said:

I look at posture, first of all, to see like – when people are walking past – I see if they are stomach-heavy or if they are leaning backwards or something. I was on a big health convention in June. People have always said to me: ‘You walk as if you always know where you’re going’, ‘you walk with such determination’ ... But when I went to this convention there were 700 people from all around the world and everybody was walking like this [shows what it means to be walking and standing in ‘good posture’: chin up, shoulders back, ‘proud with the chest’, ‘tummy zipped up’, these are expressions she uses in other parts of the interview too but also typically uses while conducting a class], I thought that’s what it is: total body awareness. It is being aware of what your body is and I think that’s what I look at,

when I first look at people. It's the posture that gives me a guideline of what they have done in the past or how they are working out or how they are living their lives.

Jonathan would probably agree with her on this. He connected the experience of his injured neck being no longer in pain with the acquisition of good posture achieved through exercise. He said:

If I go for a long period of time without doing anything physically, my posture gets bad and my neck hurts. If I am exercising, I feel much fuller of energy and I tend to sit up straight.

He eliminates thus his pain through exercise; he improves an unhealthy condition and feels he can do things better.

The healthy body is additionally a body which is neither 'overweight' nor 'skinny'. For Maggie it is outrageous that people are 'fat' and are just happy with that. She strongly believes that being overweight is not good for one's health and further connects health in the form of being slim with happiness (with a good mental state and a whole healthy attitude to life, as well). She said:

I just can't understand how it can be healthy. ... I really can't understand that at all when [people] say they are fat and happy. I think it is more of an 'I can't be bothered exercising or losing weight' syndrome. It's like smokers say 'I am happy smoking' because they can't be bothered giving up. ... But how can anyone who is clinically obese be healthy? That's the way I see it, I mean they are putting their life at risk, as do smokers or anyone else who is messing with their health.

Maggie's words reflect also the sense of obligation that everybody should have to maintain their health in good condition and reveal how she feels that all people should try to adhere to this norm just as she does. They further implicitly demonstrate how we may all come to be normalised and how our behaviours come to be standardised on the basis of normative judgements, like the ones Maggie makes about how people (should) behave. They suggest additionally that Foucault is probably correct in arguing that power – as the power to control one's health, too – belongs to all and that everyone is obliged to exercise it upon one's self.

Analogous feelings of rage for people's unhealthy habits exist also towards those who construct (or rather deconstruct) their bodies as 'stick-thin'. Maria, talking about super-models argued:

It's a personal opinion but I think they are too skinny. I do think models in general are just too skinny, too skinny to look healthy. They don't give you an impression of well being.

Constance also said:

[Sometimes] you see somebody coming in the class and you want to say to them: 'please, leave my class, don't work out, just go and have really good meal and put some weight on'. I mean, you can't say that to people but having been through that myself I am aware of the dangers of it, and I am also aware of how healthy you should be and that what you put in your body now is forever and after what you are going to be.

Francis confirmed:

[Exercise helps.] In terms of toning up, I think it does. ... I wouldn't go to the gym only to lose weight, because I know it's unhealthy and it would get a bit dodgy. But in terms of toning up and feeling healthy inside as well as outside, it helps.

The healthy body was alternatively described as a body that is 'in proportion' (Norman); as one that is toned, has 'muscle definition' ('to protect the bones from injury', as Constance said) but not 'over-bulging muscles', as this would imply in most instances the consumption of other (chemical) substances, which is considered by all participants as detrimental to health (see analogous remarks in Grogan and Richards, 2002: 220). Bruce argued characteristically on the matter: "I wouldn't take anything like that, if I want to have my body in the long run." Kostas characterised as pure "show-offs" and "insecure" the people who go to the gym and spend hours there simply trying to get a muscular body and make use of such substances for the purpose. He said:

Many of [them] have goals that go beyond measure. ... They exhaust themselves, cause really serious damage to their bodies, take substances that are detrimental to their health, strain their muscles, destroy their livers, their lungs.

What I have tried to identify in the last sections is what people think constitutes a healthy body and a healthy attitude towards the body. At certain points, elements of overlap with the other forces of power that lead people to the gym which I introduced at the beginning (fitness, beauty, pleasure) have started to become apparent; in the way people talk about 'healthy' as 'nice' bodies, for instance, or in the way they talk about health and the happiness that derives from pursuing health and knowing that one is becoming healthy. I will continue discussing each of these elements separately and in the end I shall take a closer look at the common themes that appear in the participants' narratives regarding the relationship of each to exercise. In addition, I will provide more specific information about the character of exercise as a disciplinary practice (repressive or empowering) that unites all these elements.

5.3. Analysing Fitness

I will now focus on 'fitness'. This is another important reason why interviewees go to the gym. I will turn to examine how these people understand what fitness is, and what they mean by 'being fit', 'keeping fit' or 'getting fitter' through exercise; what a fit body is for them and what it does or should look like.

For some people fitness is, if not necessarily identical or synonymous, then very similar to the idea of good health. As we read in Coward, fitness is defined, like health, as something "more than the absence of disease" (1989: 60). It is "a feeling of all-over well-being that generates from good joint flexibility and muscular development, from healthy lungs and heart stamina, and from the ability to exert reasonable stress on the body with positive re-invigorating results" (Mandell cited in Coward, 1989: 60). It is supposed to be about "emotional health [rather than] beauty and sexuality" (1989: 62). To put it briefly, it is associated with 'energy' and the 'increase' and 'expansion' of the body's capacities (Coward, 1989: 60-1). It is to do with one's ability, acquired through exercise, to do "effortlessly" whatever one wants

to do in life or to be able “to produce more [and consume more]” (Coward, 1989: 61-2) – or, as Foucault would probably say it once again, to construct one’s body as ‘useful’ (DP: 26).

The participants in the study offered on many occasions similar interpretations to those presented in the relevant literature as to what fitness is. These ranged from ‘one’s ability to carry out their day-to-day tasks without getting unduly tired’ or ‘enhancing and improving one’s performance in a sport’ (like running smoothly, playing football, swimming or rowing effortlessly). But interviewees also often said that fitness is similar to ‘looking good’ and ‘keeping one’s figure’, too. Maria implied that fitness in many instances means both good health and good looks:

A: [Exercise] is a fitness issue and an issue of fitting into a size 10 to 12.

Q: When you say a ‘fitness issue’, what do you mean?

A: A general state of well-being, to begin with, which basically means I don’t want to feel exhausted after climbing, say 7 set of stairs. It’s just appalling for someone who is 26. ... I want to feel comfortable in my body, as a state of health and a self-image thing.

The “self-image thing” seems to point more to issues of appearance and looks that I will discuss analytically later. Her comment makes it obvious, however, that for some interviewees ‘fitness’ constitutes a separate category that accumulates elements that relate both to health and appearance⁹⁸.

Yet, the concept proves often to have its own particulars as well and, as I previously implied, it is related to the ‘competitiveness’ of a more athletic or sporty lifestyle (for the more athletic types), or the enhancement of body strength and stamina, or the ability to ‘function in life’ in general (for all the rest). It is often described as “the absence of any physical or mental impairment that interferes with social functioning”, as a “secure, comfortable relationship with a socially organised and materially constructed environment” and as the sense of “being able to” (Freund and Martin, 2004: 273-4⁹⁹).

⁹⁸ On the frequent association of fitness with appearance, see also Freund and Martin, 2004: 273.

⁹⁹ Freund and Martin also add however that they concentrate on “fitness and unfitness” as concepts that are also “socially constructed within the cultural contexts in which uses of the body occur” (2004: 274) and use the examples of walking and driving to illustrate how different perceptions of fitness in these two contexts occur. For example, they demonstrate that being fit for driving may mean being unfit for walking long distances but fitness to drive is an ability on its own (2004: 279). The authors

It is these special characteristics in my view that prevent us from incorporating fitness into, or treating it as a sub-division of other categories. The fact though that fitness often implies the parallel existence of good health, good physical condition, is the reason why the term is often used as a generic one to describe the whole of what I prefer to call 'gym culture'. I use this term precisely because I find it encompasses and reflects the existence of a much wider range of ideals that exercise in the gym is supposed to serve than fitness, even if the latter is to be perceived broadly (contra, Sassatelli (1999, 2000) who talks of 'keep-fit' culture, instead¹⁰⁰). Moreover fitness seems to be much more easily integrated into the idea of self-discipline and the notion of the carceral continuum than health, as in the latter case, one would often expect to see a wider range of professionals caring for its maintenance. In any case, let me illustrate the specific ways in which interviewees define fitness.

5.3.1. Defining Fitness

Kostas' narrative is useful here, as it portrays the similarities between fitness and health (especially between fitness and mental and emotional health, the so called 'feel-good' factor), but also pinpoints the particulars of fitness: namely, the increase and expansion of the body's capacities. He said, describing the experience of exercise:

It was amazing. Every single time was amazing because it was a way of getting all my energy out and I felt good for my body but I also felt good inside.

To my question if he had ever felt that he had reached his limits when exercising, he responded:

admit that according to their analytical model the focus shifts away from individuals and in this sense their study is not directly relevant to this one but has been referred to here because they have provided some of the meanings of fitness that we also find interviewees using.

¹⁰⁰ In my view, Sassatelli and the others who use the term do so as they also want in one word to demonstrate the variety of reasons why people exercise and the large number of obligations that they are expected to meet (look good, be healthy, be capable and so on). But given that many of my interviewees referred to it as a separate category, as a separate reason why they go to the gym, I have preferred to follow their categorisation of ideals rather than to impose on their interpretations of the gym experience the generic concept of fitness.

Usually, I knew what was demanded from me and I have never felt that I have been exhausted or that I have reached my limits but I have felt that I have expanded or extended my limits.

For Betty fitness is again connected more to health and maintaining her cardiovascular system in good condition. She talked, for example, about the benefits of exercise such as STEPPING and revealed that she does it because she thinks that it “improves [her] general fitness”, her “cardiovascular” fitness, she clarified later on. Maggie also expressed a similar view on the matter: “I think a lot of people are coming [to the gym] to get fit more than, actually, to lose weight.” She seemed to associate fitness with something other than appearance. Her words remind us of Coward’s comment that fitness has more to do with health than beauty or appearance. I asked her to clarify if she felt so too. She responded:

Yes. Actually people come in order to get cardiovascularly fit, to get their hearts stronger and their muscles stronger.

She added: “People come because they are trying to get fit, they are thinking about their health a bit more”.

That many of the participants perceive of fitness as related more to health than to image and beauty is also apparent from the quote that follows, albeit in a rather subversive manner:

I think a lot of people go to the gym because of the way they look. I don’t particularly go only because I want to be fit. I go because I want to keep my figure, as well,

said Diana, pointing at the differentiation between fitness and ‘good looks’. By negating that she goes to the gym only in order to be fit and emphasizing that she wants mainly to keep her figure, Diana dissociates fitness from looking good.

To the extent that fitness is perceived and presented as a value similar to health, whatever I have said about the proliferation of health as an ideal and about people’s pursuit of health goes for fitness as well.

Fitness as related to health and parallel to it is, equally, promoted very broadly. A look at the titles of large numbers of magazines displayed at various newsagents' shops (a classic one being "Fitness and Health" itself), at the articles that can be found in them or at the brochures that advertise various exercise programmes, testifies to this connection between the two notions. Yet it is also obvious that something separates one from the other.

As I have said, fitness is for many people associated with how one looks rather than with how one is, in terms of physical condition, or feels at a particular moment. This is also apparent in a good number of the participants' responses. Let me give some more attention to these responses¹⁰¹.

We have seen often in the previous chapters that in order to classify as good-looking, meaning fit and vice versa, a person should appear 'not to be overweight'. Weight, here, is not presented as a matter of health, contrary to what we have seen before, but more as a beauty issue. Jonathan said early on in our conversation that he feels he is 'chubby'. He told me that he was obese as a child. He did not like this at all, because it was a "very difficult" situation for him to cope with. His extra weight was something that was "picked on by other people, who are looking for a reason to pick on". Jonathan wants to get a 'six-pack' at some point, he admitted; he finds 'washboard abs' 'attractive'. He likes the fact that exercise makes him feel that he can eventually reach his goal ("well, actually not exercising the way I do now, because I haven't been going to the gym as much as I think I should be going", he adds). To my question of whether he noticed his body changing through exercise, he replied:

Yes, my body changes, I get fitter, I notice that. My trousers are getting a bit looser, I use an extra knot on the belt, that's always good. I look a little fitter; still not my ideal but yeah [pause]. I'll never attain that 6-pack. [He laughs]

"Looking fitter is the same as looking good, for you, then?" I asked, because of what he had said before about the way he sees himself. "Yes", he replied.

¹⁰¹ To the extent that fitness is associated with appearance, whatever I will say in the relevant section about image and looks will also help further the idea of fitness as related to appearance.

There were others who also share this idea and associate fitness with looks. Bruce is another example. Although for him fitness is primarily related to the ability to live a life of better quality and, an “easier” one, he also said: “keep[ing] yourself fit [is] to make you feel good about yourself, the way you look”. Maria, who as we may recall in the first instance connected fitness to both health and image, later in the conversation began to slide towards associating it mostly with ‘looks’. She believes that the construction of a fit body through exercise will enable her “to fit in the clothes I like really and to look good. It’s just the looking good thing.”

Given the aforementioned, it seems reasonable to argue that fitness is an ideal that occupies the space between, covers and brings together aspects of both, health and appearance or aesthetics.

There seems to be, however, one further attribute that people associate with fitness, something other than health or looks. Lisa described the practical effects of training for fitness’ sake in this manner:

I find that I am on the go all day at work and I find that – now that I’ve been coming to the gym regularly and coming to the classes regularly – I am not as tired any more. I am up and down the stairs, you know, maybe 50 or 60 times a day at work and I find that, since I have been coming here I am not as out of breath or as tired. I don’t necessarily say that I find it easier in itself but I certainly get through the day a lot better because I am not tired any more.

Barbara similarly portrayed getting fitter as “get[ting] more stamina” and, again, like Lisa “not running out of breath when I climb the stairs or something”. Bruce, analogously, when replying to my question on the benefits of exercise, argued: “It’s going to make every day life much easier, isn’t it? People are getting fitter.”

The use of phrases like ‘not getting tired’, ‘getting to live an easier life’, ‘getting stronger’ and ‘having stamina’ in these previous examples point to what I have argued previously about fitness needing to be seen as a separate category, one that is indicative of one’s ability to function and perform in life. Although these same phrases were employed several times by interviewees to describe what constitutes health, it was clear that here they used them to describe fitness as something distinct from health. So they said, too.

Fitness has also a special meaning for those who are more athletic. They refer to it as something more related with competitiveness and one's ability to perform well in sport. Among these people are David and James. David said:

Fitness for me is very specific. As I said, I play football so fitness for me is the training I do being geared to improve my performance as a football player.

He continued though, by giving interpretations similar to the ones I have presented before about how it may be broadly perceived for the people who are not playing a particular sport:

For those that are not playing sport, fitness to me would be feeling healthy and able to carry out their day-to-day tasks without being unduly tired or unable to finish their day-to-day tasks. It's about day-to-day living, doing things in the house, going back and forth to the shop and being able to carry one's trolley and things like that, or be able to do the garden. For others fitness would be to improve the shape of their body.

James described a bad experience that he associates with exercise and identified as "not meeting your goal and feeling very unfit". I asked him to tell me how he would define fitness and what it means for him to be fit or unfit and whether he perceives of himself as being fit. James enjoys long-distance running but he also said that he is "known to be overdoing it sometimes" with his lifestyle; he is known occasionally to lose his balance; he drinks too much, does not getting enough rest and misses meals. He said that now he is in one of his 'most sensible periods' but behaving insensibly was not a rarity for him in the past. This often made it difficult for him to run for as long as he wanted the next day. He would often have to give up. In an interesting manner, he responded to my question:

A: I think I am the caste between non-fit and fit. I am always on that kind of border-line and occasionally I weigh slightly into fit and occasionally I turn slightly into not very fit, but I never really get either side of that particularly well. So, what does fit mean to me? What would I have to do to be fit? [Pause] Well, I seem to have a terrible perception of fit because I think it would have to be someone who – you know – is a professional athlete that trains every day, or somebody who plays sport professionally or competitively. That, I would say, would be someone who's fit, I think. But I wouldn't be able to see myself as being fit.

Q: So, is fitness related to competitiveness?

A: I think that the competitiveness, well, you see this might be because I am going to [this gym] where there are teams in there training very regularly. ... And I think the regularity of them doing it, the regularity of them having to compete, gives you that fitness.

What is also apparent in James' account is that he believes that to become fit (or to reach this standard, to comply with it) one has to do something regularly. He brings into our discussion the element of routine and repetition of activities which we also find in Foucauldian accounts on power (see discussion in sections 2.1.2. and 2.1.4.). He implied that following a certain disciplinary regime day after day or, in any case, with a certain degree of frequency, enables one to expand one's knowledge and capacities with regard to what one is doing (analogously, Coward, 1989: 63). Fitness, as I shall show, means for James doing something without effort. But I also prompted him to clarify whether it may be for him an issue of health or an issue of appearance because several times in other parts of our conversation, he talked about exercise that is beneficial to the cardiovascular system or enables one to 'look' fitter. He said:

A: No. You see, I perceive being fit – if I had to picture it, it would have to be running fast, smoothly, without effort in a really good rhythm for a long distance¹⁰². If I had to picture it, that's what it would be. It wouldn't be particularly about what I looked like. It would be about how I felt when I was running. When I feel fit, that's how I feel when I am running. Everything just moves very smoothly, it's very effortless. You know you are not coughing and your heart stops – yeah, I think it has an element of health in it as well because you really feel good inside¹⁰³. Actually, I feel good outside as well but it doesn't make me feel as if I am particularly you know good-looking or that I feel that I have a particularly fit body-type. That's not really an element for me.

For James, then, as is the case with David too, fitness is almost always directly associated with a more sporty life than with everyday living, contrary to what is the

¹⁰² James is talking about his personal experience of long distance running. For others, like Maggie, who was a sprinter and hurdler, being able to run fast would be associated with being fit. The important thing to keep in mind is that fitness is associated with performing well and doing effortlessly, whatever one chooses to do.

¹⁰³ Again we have a definition of health as feeling good emotionally and mentally and not just physically.

case for other interviewees. It is also though about doing things smoothly. But James' last comment also points to the connection between fitness and mental health and illustrates the interplay of these ideals.

Let me, now, turn to see how participants in the study perceive the fit body and what they believe its attributes and appearance should be.

5.3.2. The Fit Body

For Betty, as we have seen, a fit body is one that is cardiovascularly strong and enduring (a healthy body, as such), but is also 'toned and firm'. Many of the other interviewees would agree with her. But, she added, a fit body is, more than anything, a body that is 'worked on' and can be seen to be so. She introduces to our discussion the notion of achievement, which many other interviewees also refer to and which I extensively discuss at the end of this chapter. Betty had a particular model in mind when she described the fit body that she told me she would some day like to reach:

What I'd like to look like is kind of – you know – that singer, Anastasia. She is kind of quite slim but is really toned. When people have really toned shoulders and arms, that's what I'd like to look like. I always hope that one day, if I keep going to the gym, I will reach that. That's for me my ideal. I don't want to be stick-thin, I don't want to be so muscly that you look freakish but somewhere in between, where – you know – people look at you and think: "God, she must work really hard to look like that". That's what I really like.

Barbara would seem to agree with Betty's initial definition that the fit body should be 'toned'. "A fit body is a toned body" she said.

For Jonathan, the fit body takes the following form: it is "a little bit muscular, not like a body-builder but someone who looks a bit athletic". His comment reveals also the association of fitness with athleticism. James expressed a similar view on the muscle definition issue, particularly as he found that his own muscle mass in the upper part of his body is not as developed; namely, fit. That is why, he explained, he now enjoys weight training. He admitted that in the past he had the impression that weights "were all for show, that it [did]n't really make you fit, that it [only] made

you bigger and bulky”, whereas now he knows that they can help him develop his upper-body strength and muscle mass, but not necessarily in an excessive way. He reveals that there is this element of “strength” but also an element of “proportion” in the material form that fitness takes, “like [being] in proportion and fit all over actually, that’s what it is”. But he reveals also that slimness may be an element of fitness on occasions, particularly when it is not much, in which case it again makes one look really unfit:

A: What would be a fit body-type? See I don’t perceive I have one I would like to build upper-body strength a bit more and have a more developed upper body. I am not entirely sure. I don’t think I have one. I am a little thin as well for that kind of thing for my perception. That is a conundrum for me as well, because as I said I talk a lot about running and running is the thing I kind of like doing and you know to be good at running you tend to have to slim down and thin yourself down and I’ve got a body shape for running but it’s not a body shape that I particularly associate with you know an ideal, a sport person.

For Luke a fit body is a body that is not overweight. Luke associated the fact that he was not fit at school and not good at sport also with the fact that he was overweight. We may recall that: “In school, I was not at all into sport. I was overweight as a child and very unfit” (see section 4.6.).

For Maria on the other hand, the fit body is “very much about having a controlled body, a body that you can control physically and mentally”. Maria here reminds us of much of the feminist debate on the body and the desire, especially among women, to be in control of their bodies. She reminds us of the many feminist writers who speak of women who want to feel in charge of their lives by controlling their bodies (often in an excessive manner) (see section 3.2.). Like them, Maria admitted that one’s body “is actually the only thing one can control in life”. She argued that life is too demanding for everybody and highlighted the importance of having a fit body (a controlled body) for the purpose also of showing that one can control one’s life, as well:

[the fit body is] a body that, when you ask it to do something, it can perform. It can actually do that something. [It is] a body that does not move about uncontrollably, a body that your

muscles can actually control. It's not about being skinny, it is about not being flabby, I suppose.

'Flabbiness' is an indication that the body is out of control (also, section 3.2.). The fit body can only become possible only if "some effort has gone into it", if the body is turned into a 'project', Maria concluded. Similarly, Bruce said that to be fit or to get fitter, to have a shaped, strong, enduring body, one has to make an extra effort every time; one has to put in more work each time one goes to the gym:

There is no point in going to the gym if you are not going to try and exceed your limits. The purpose is to get fitter. You'll never get fitter if you keep doing the same thing every day.

He seems to be suggesting – in a rather Foucauldian manner – the need for a continuous involvement and further experimentation with the various modes of exercise and training, the need of a continuous subjection to ever more 'demanding' routines. Otherwise, one is not going to have the opportunity to learn things, to live new experiences, to acquire knowledges about one's potentials and about how to make one's life easier, which, as we have seen, is for Bruce the main purpose of any kind of discipline, including exercise. By 'exceeding', he clarified, he does not mean exhausting oneself ("there is a difference between pushing yourself and killing yourself", he commented) but rather testing how far you can go every time. Again, we find the element of expansion of the body's capacities and detect again the need that the body is constantly worked on that characterises fitness in what he added:

I find most people understand that if I walk 5 miles to my work every day, after a short period of time that is no longer exercise, because my body is used to doing that. People think that because I do the job I do, I've got a body like this. I don't have a body like this. I have to go to the gym to get a body like this. ... You have to try with everything you do in life. You have to try something new. It's not good going to the gym and doing the same routine, lifting the same weights or doing that same aerobics class for a year. (Bruce)

But Bruce also acknowledges and always remembers that "your body can only go a certain size".

One can see that, as is the case with health, taking up fitness means working on it on one's own. To get the benefits associated with the ideal (an ideal that is equally diffuse and widespread as the others) means subjecting oneself to discipline, to routine and regulation. The effects of discipline are written on the body. What they primarily reveal, as is the case with health, is that the fit body is also and primarily a body that is looked after, taken care of, is literally worked upon.

Furthermore, the fact is that the interviewees acknowledge that subjection to discipline does not have only negative effects on us or on our bodies though (does not only restrain us and control us), but that it can help us learn things, acquire different skills and be actually able to do things. It enhances our abilities. It actually makes us healthy and fit. It produces knowledges about ourselves, about who we are, about what we can do, about our position in the world, namely, and promises to or helps us to cope with life and get pleasure out of subjecting ourselves to these regulations and routines, as Foucault would also say (THS, vol. 3: 144; also, Coward, 1989: 64).

Let me now concentrate on the third ideal; the issue of appearance and beauty and investigate how interviewees perceive the body beautiful.

5.4. Analysing Image and Beauty

As I have argued, for a significant number of participants improving their image is a reason why they go to the gym. 'Vanity' is an attribute of interviewees' personalities the existence of which many did not deny. On the contrary, caring for one's looks was mentioned as something they consciously experienced and even cultivated. 'I suppose, I am a bit vain, yes' or 'I want to look good' are phrases that were not rare in their personal stories.

Before I start analysing the meaning that 'looking good' has for the interviewees, however, I would like to refer to some issues that surprised me particularly at the early stages of the study but also at the time of the analysis of the material. One of them, as I have argued in previous pages, was the very realisation that in many cases aspiring to an aesthetic ideal and wishing to acquire a slim, toned or muscular body for the sake of beauty is not the only reason why people spent

hours working out. Interviewees and non-users of the gym showed me with their responses that there was more to exercise than just the pursuit of beauty that they were aiming at. Another was that appearance and beauty were not simply issues of body size and/or muscle definition, as the literature often suggested (see section 3.2. but also 3.5.). Maria's statement for instance that a beautiful body is a healthy body revealed that a number of other features could identify with the body beautiful and confirmed the impact of a number of other forces on the creation of our desire to train.

One cannot of course disagree that the treatment of the body through exercise is often aiming at enhancing beauty.

And I must admit that having been influenced myself by the variety of studies and articles that spoke of exercise as a means of achieving the 'body beautiful', I was initially sceptical when people were providing different reasons than beauty when asked why they exercise. I felt that they were doing so because they did not want to seem 'vain' or 'shallow'. They might have feared that if they showed that they placed emphasis on the care of their body in order to become beautiful, they would have appeared unsophisticated and trivial.

In a number of informal discussions about the project, I was also often told that I should be particularly careful about this – that people might not want to reveal their true reasons for going to the gym (namely, simply to get a nice looking body). Given the value that is often attributed in our cultures to the accomplishments of the mind and the lesser significance of the matters of the flesh which is evident also in literature (we may recall that the body has long held a secondary position in much epistemological discourse as the late development of the field of sociology of the body also testifies – see section 1.1.4.), it is easy to understand why people might have avoided talking about beauty and their pursuits of it.

However, my experience in the field showed me that interviewees were quite sincere in their answers. They did not hesitate to speak their minds and admit their vanity and tell a number of personal stories and make a number of comments that could make them seem vain. They also helped me realise though that they used words such as 'thinness', 'tone' and 'muscularity' not only to characterise the body as beautiful, but also as signifiers of other attributes equally important as beauty.

They helped me with their narratives to reconsider the meanings that we attribute to such words by connecting them not only to aesthetics but also to a number of other notions like health and fitness.

In any case, given the questions I asked and the duration of the interviews, I do not think that interviewees would have managed to pretend for long that they exercised for reasons other than those they admitted. I am also tempted to believe that had participants not wanted to talk about what exercise meant to them after I had explained the project to them, they would have refrained from doing so on the whole rather than not say truly what they felt or why they exercise.

What was as striking to me as the fact that when people talked about exercise and their bodies, they did not only talk about beauty, was that during the course of the study I realised, once again in contrast to what one often reads in books and articles, that dissatisfaction with appearance is an issue which also concerns a large part of the male population (see, the reasons why my male interviewees go to the gym as described in section 4.6.; also, Grogan and Richards, 2002: 220)¹⁰⁴. Many men said they want others to think that they have nice physiques; they care about the impressions they make on others and therefore look after their bodies. Jonathan admitted to caring a lot about the way he looks and wanting to look nice. Kostas also confirmed that there was a stage in his life where he exercised because he wanted to look good, so that he could attract women's attention. Albert also spoke of the importance of having a nice body, particularly since he enjoys going to gay bars and clubs where he can dance topless. He said additionally that his looks would matter even more if he were single and "on the pull" for a boyfriend, but that still it is important for him that he looks as nice even though he is now in a relationship¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ That men now care for their appearance and constitute, therefore, a 'rapidly increasing market' is also evident in the work of Mishkind (1992: 61).

¹⁰⁵ The concern about appearance and looks is not only an attribute of those who go to the gym, although it is more easily identifiable in their narratives and reflected in their behaviours. However, it seems that many of the non-gym goers also know what it means to look good and what it takes to achieve those looks. A friend of mine – a rather overweight thirty year old man – said during an informal conversation: "Me? Going to the gym? With a body like this? I went once, just once, and the instructor said that because you are a little chubby we should make a more intensive programme for you. That was it, run out and never got back again". His remark about his body indicates that he is aware of the fact that his physique does not comply with what we could call the standard, the norm. However, his fear of the amount of discipline to which he believes he would have to be subjected to in order to make his body reach the norm, is what drove him away from the gym.

It is true, of course, that beauty was mostly perceived by interviewees as a female concern, and was understood as such also by those male interviewees who admitted that they care (and like to care) about their own looks. Bruce said he wants to look good and he believes that other men do so as well. He assured me quite emphatically that “anyone who’d tell you anything different is a liar!” But he added graphically and tellingly:

A man looks in the mirror and he might have a beer-belly or something but he sees an Adonis, a woman looks in the mirror and she might be like a model but all she sees is a fat arse.

Along similar lines, Francis said:

Men feel the pressure to have decent muscles and decent build. I think they have the same pressure to work out, but I don’t think they suffer from the same self-consciousness as girls do. Well, I talk to my flatmate who’s a guy and exercises and it seems the same pressure but then again you have a bunch of girls looking at a guy and it’s not the same with a bunch of guys looking at a girl. ... If a guy has put on a bit of weight, a bit of fat, it’s OK. But for girls it’s so much more of an issue. They will be more scrutinised.

Comments like the last one reminded me of the claims of those writers who often argued that women experience a different kind of pressure to look good (especially thinner) in comparison to men. Women are meant to be slim (but we are somehow all expected to have toned bodies), whereas men are expected to be more muscular and clearly defined than women. We may further discern then that there might still be a certain imperative for men to construct their bodies according to a certain model (a more massive, more aggressive one). We could further argue that this imperative, to the extent that it does not allow men to transgress the limits of machismo (and reflected in their denial to join certain exercising activities, such as aerobics), implies something about the character of relations between the sexes and possibly validates some of the feminist claims presented earlier. It seems to confirm, for example, those assumptions which suggest that men, unconsciously, still construct their bodies according to the norms of patriarchy. But what is more important to bear in mind here is probably that what the aforementioned quotes profoundly suggest is that men

are also subjected to power. The fact that men are also concerned about their image reminds us of Foucault's point that everyone is subjected to power (which here takes the form of a mandate that demands from people to look a certain way) although power relations may indeed be asymmetrical and men and women might experience them differently (see, analogously, THS, vol. 1: 127).

If women, though, also train nowadays to be strong and active, as many interviewees' comments illustrate (see, sections 5.2.1. and 5.3.1.), this even more clearly shows that if our bodies are constructed in certain ways, it is because they are caught up in such nexuses of power that aim at something more or other than the reproduction of a particular gender order only. It shows, namely, that the construction of our flesh is reinforcing definitely some kind of relations but that these are not necessarily or primarily patriarchal ones. Regardless though of the degree to which people are affected, what is certain is that certain aesthetic ideals exist, that deserve our attention.

Let me turn, then, to the interviewees' own words and see which these ideals are. Let me show what constitutes for them good looks, how participants in the study debate appearance and beauty in general and their own appearances in particular, how they express their vanity, how they talk of flaws in their looks, how they treat exercise in the gym as helping them to improve their image and what they think of the existing social standards of appearance. Let me demonstrate to what extent their views are in agreement with what the literature suggests.

5.4.1. Appearance and Exercise

That attending a gym and exercising can help people improve their image or the idea they have of themselves is apparent in its mottoes: "Looking good and feeling great" is, as we have seen, one of the main slogans of the gym that one notices in bold, capital letters in many exercise rooms. The majority of respondents, regardless of what they presented as the main reasons for exercising now, also repeated that 'people, in general, want to look good'. And they exercise for the sake of fashion, beauty and desirability – namely, so that people look good, can wear nice clothes and be seen as desirable and likeable by friends, peers and (prospective, male or female)

partners. Special emphasis was placed on the issue of weight (extra but also less) and body shape (the construction of a muscular, toned, well-proportioned, firm body) but not only on these.

I think that there's people ... that actually genuinely enjoy exercise ... for the fun of it. ... Some people go because they want to feel healthier, because they feel that they need a healthy body and exercise will give you a healthy body. But I also think that there is a great number of people out there very much like me. I don't think in any way I am an exception to the rule. There are a lot of people out there ... who exercise because they want to lose weight or because they want to keep in shape for fashion's sake really. (Maria)

Because all the interviewees have had at some point in their lives issues with their image and all want to look good, all had something to say about what they believe constitutes a beautiful body. However, the extent and the degree of emphasis placed on appearance varied according to the individuals' interests, demands, expectations, priorities and other obligations in these particular phases of their lives at the time of the interviews.

Maggie replied to my question about her decision to start exercising:

Apart from the fact that I was an athlete I think it was body-image as well, trying to look after my body-shape [and] never getting overweight.

She told me later: "I like to take pride in the way I look". Similarly, 'I wasn't happy with the way I looked', 'I felt my stomach was too big', 'I did not like the fact that I had fat legs' and therefore started training, were very common answers to the same question.

Kostas said that he was "seeking for approval and self-esteem" through exercise when he was younger and wanted "to improve his image". He felt that he had changed now:

I have completed my studies, I have achieved goals that I wanted to achieve, I feel much better about myself, about who I am and know what I am worth. I have confidence in myself.

So, he added, appearance “could be the fourth or fifth reason down my list now [why I go to the gym]”.

This is not to say, however, that overall people care for their looks only when they have less important things to do or ‘less high’ aspirations. For many, appearance is equally as important as health, fitness and many other things. As Maria argued, “people just want to look good and there is nothing wrong with that”. Maggie expressed a similar opinion; when talking about her body and how she feels about it, she described what she might do for her image:

I would have a nose job and a face lift and the rest of it if I could afford it – just purely because I think you should make the best of yourself, particularly as one is getting older. I think everyone has got to have a treat, I mean not striving with perfection, but I think, you know, a lot of people want to look good as they are getting older and there is nothing wrong with that.

5.4.2. The Particulars of Appearance and the Body Beautiful

One may decipher what constitutes beauty or a nice appearance for interviewees by the use of adjectives such as ‘attractive’, ‘elegant’ and, of course, ‘beautiful’, ‘desirable’ and ‘sexy’. One can ask then and, consequently, investigate what the body has to look like, in order to be described as such. What is, namely, a nice, attractive, elegant, beautiful, sexy body for the participants. They responded in various ways to this question. The following elements that interviewees associate with beauty and the body beautiful; they seem to be for them the basic features of beauty. I present them in a rather codified form:

Firmness and Tone: “I saw this photo of mine holding my son and my arms seemed a bit wobbly and I did not like that, it didn’t look nice” said Diana. Barbara analogously said: “It’s nice shaving your legs, for instance, and seeing that they are not wobbly”. Maria said that what she has defined previously as fit (having a controlled body) is also aesthetically nice:

You wouldn't want to see your belly hanging out of your trousers, it's gross. In some types of clothing having a flabby body and cellulite is gross.

Muscularity: "I like a bit of muscles, I find it sexy" said Katia. Jonathan agrees. As we have seen, for him, a "nice body is one which is a bit athletic, but not body builder type". However, excess muscularity is not aesthetically appreciated. "It's a joke", Katia added. If we accept that it is also often considered unhealthy to be overtly muscular as it implies the use of substances, we can see why it is not something aesthetically acceptable as well (see also Grogan and Richards, 2002: 219-20). Absence of muscle mass is not nice either. Constance says:

Take a ballerina's body ... From far away it's nice and elegant but from up close it's pretty revolting. It's just a skeleton with a bit of skin on top.

We may further realise that a nice body is a body in *Proportion*: Norman argued: "A nice looking body is one that is in proportion". For Ulrike, as well, "the ideal body would be proportionately built". Not overly muscular, not excessively thin. "Like the one you see in those biology posters at school; really symmetrical".

Weight: That men have grown to be concerned about their appearance and that the 'right' appearance means for them too having slimmer and lean bodies, literature has started to highlight for some years now. That men want to show willpower, much like women do, in constructing their bodies in this way is also something that various studies emphasise (Grogan and Richards, 2002: 226, 227, 228 and 230). Katia said:

I think actually people go to the gym to lose weight because you have to be somehow like the world tells you. Let's put it this way: there is no place for fat people.

'Fat people' implies men as well. And she added:

I guess if I lived in a society where everybody was merry and fat, you know like these older paintings, like the naked Aphrodite with the curly hair and the breasts hanging a bit. I mean, that was perfectly acceptable, then. It was like a beauty model. If it was the same now, I

wouldn't care. People wouldn't care. But people care, and I care not because I care but because I know subconsciously there is a prototype. There is a model.

She repeated: "Nobody, man or woman, is supposed to be fat." Similarly, Jonathan admitted that as he does not like being overweight himself:

I would find it a bit difficult to be attracted to somebody who's obese but generally when I meet somebody I'll try to find other things to appreciate.

Ulrike also revealed: "[when I was younger] I didn't feel comfortable being too big, didn't really feel comfortable in the clothes that I was wearing." She added however that weight can be also an issue for those who might be underweight as for those who are over the standard: "some people go to the gym to put on some weight and help increase their muscle mass."

Francis said that she gets depressed with the idea "of getting over the normal size". She wants to "keep [her] weight the same", yet her lean figure would never make one think that Francis would have actually an issue with this. And although, as we may recall, she goes to the gym not only to lose weight, her talk about the depression that the thought of growing to a larger size makes her feel, is indicative of the fact that weight is still an issue associated with beauty which preoccupies many people.

Youthfulness: A number of people associate beauty with youthfulness and believe that exercise can prevent or rather delay the 'natural' deterioration of the body that comes with ageing. Lisa likes the fact that she looks younger than she is, particularly since her husband is a lot younger than she. She believes that exercise can make her look younger, gives her a younger looking body, as it makes her more energetic, active and helps her feel less tired:

I want to stay younger looking ... My husband is nine years younger than me and I feel we don't look as if, I mean, I don't feel my age but I feel if I am going to keep up with him, I am going to have to exercise; not because I need but because I want to. I don't want to look old, I don't want to feel old and I want to keep it up that way. When he first met me, he couldn't tell how old I am and I quite liked that. And you know, if I am going to keep looking – I

mean we are all going to get old some day, it's inevitable – but if I am going to keep the distance between us not looking what it is, then I am going to keep on exercising but I enjoy it too. (Lisa)

Her desire to keep looking younger is, of course, becoming stronger, as Lisa's husband is younger. But Lisa always felt that she was lucky enough to look younger – thus more active, full of life; on the whole 'good'-looking. This is what the fact that her husband was unable to tell her age indicates. And she believes that exercise will help her not to lose that privilege of hers.

Having examined what the interviewees associate beauty and the body beautiful with, I will now turn to investigate how these ideals of beauty are promoted in the different cultures represented by the participants in my study.

5.4.3. Specific 'Cultures' and the Promotion of Aesthetics

In section 3.2., I presented studies showing how the ideal of beauty in its variant forms is promoted in society. The role of the media is important, but as the relevant literature also suggests, it is not the one that most influences people's perceptions of beauty. Representatives of the media industry often rightly complain about the accusations made against them that they are responsible for the creation of many of the contemporary cultural pathologies. In arguing that they show what people often expect to see, media managers point to the fact that there are wider perceptions about beauty that we all try to adhere to and that they are only one actor in the promotion of these perceptions about beauty. Furthermore, they do justice to Foucault who claims that power is not something in the hands of the few, for them to possess and direct, but something we can all exercise.

The interviewees also acknowledged a number of other cultural influences (from peers, ethnic groups and so on, rather than the media only) which had an effect on the formulation of their ideas on what constitutes the body beautiful and their choice to exercise in order to abide to the current rules of aestheticism. Let us now see some of these influences.

Maria revealed that she comes from a culture that is very much oriented towards body image and which appreciates good looks. She explained what

constitutes good looks in this environment and demonstrated further to what the development of this particular beauty ideology may be attributed:

Cyprus has more of a body-image culture, in the sense that there is a lot of sunshine and it's really hot so you don't wear as many clothes as you do here, so you are exhibiting your body for the most part of the year, especially during the summer. I mean thinking back, in May – the month before you show yourself to the beach – everybody would go to the gym, everyone would go on a diet because they would like to look good for when they would have to spend four months lying on the beach. And you wouldn't want the rest of the country to see that you are in an appalling state. So everyone would pressure themselves and they still do. In fact, I think it's far more in practice now as years go by. Everyone I know has now joined a gym. So, it's very much a peer-pressure issue that people feel the need to go because everyone is doing it.

Albert and Trevor discussed similar influences they have from the gay community. Albert is aware that to reveal your body in the gay scene, you have to have a nice body. Trevor says he would not do something like dancing topless because he is 'a bit chubby' and gay culture is too 'body-fascist' to accept analogous deviations from the model of the "sizzling, well-built, six-pack guy".

I have also shown before how something like the beautiful body as described above is valued particularly among different age groups. Most interviewees admit that, especially when younger, they exercised because they wanted to have a slim and toned body for the sake of being appreciated by their peers (see, Kostas' remark in section 4.6.). I have illustrated the cruelty with which people of a younger age often faced their fellows who were overweight (Norman and Jonathan as overweight children were often targets of such cruelty).

Women are particularly affected (Bruce's earlier comment reflects in a rather stereotypical manner societies' expectations from women in terms of their appearance).

All these remarks indicate that a certain idea of aesthetics is well embedded in our society and is reproduced by a variety of groups and in a variety of people's interactions.

It might be worth further asking though how has this particular notion of beauty in the form of a lean, toned body, come about and prevailed?

One may indeed notice a paradox that in an era of massive and almost uncontrollable production of goods, equally in an era of wealth and consumption, beauty comes to find its expression in the aforementioned lean, toned, even ascetic, at times, model. Susan Bordo provides an interesting and plausible interpretation of this phenomenon in her work of 1990, which interviewees' narratives often also confirm. She attributes this paradox to the development of the work ethic that paralleled the appearance of, supported and fed back to, the development of capitalism (1990: 96) and to the simultaneous (in the 18th century) creation of an ideology wherein "excess body weight came to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy or lack of will" (1990: 94). It was the era, she tells us, when the bourgeoisie gained its status and made its rise to the forefront of the social scene. The middle-classes' ability to show that they had 'taken over' and that they could continue to work to keep the new economy going was reflected not only in the control they exercised over social resources but also in the management of their lives and, more importantly, the control of their own flesh (Bordo, 1990: 94, 96). The bodies of the bourgeoisie had to reflect that they could be useful at any time for the sustainability of the new political order (as Foucault also said), but only if they were controlled, tamed, made thin and toned, could they continue to be so (Bordo, 1990: 100). Excess weight was a sign of lack of control; in other words, a sign of lack of usefulness. So even if consumption of large quantities of goods was possible, the enhanced control of the body and its lean and firm constitution came to be a symbol of status and identity (also, Davis, 1995: 49).

It is not surprising then to see that in our era too, an era of even more advanced capitalism, similar perceptions about the need to control the body and make it lean and firm and toned prevail and have been elevated to an aesthetic ideal.

Having shown what beauty is associated with, let me now attend to the last of the reasons why people go to the gym.

5.5. Analysing Emotions and Pleasure

A number of people go to the gym because exercise for them is purely 'pleasure'. It was obvious from the process of observation that people felt good after

exercising. They were clapping, they were smiling. But when they came to describe what they felt, they frequently struggled to do so. The ‘emotionality’ or ‘briefness’ or even ‘abruptness’ of their responses often made it difficult to identify or talk about an ideal of pleasure as such. “I do it because I like it”, “I don’t know, it just makes me feel so good” are some of the phrases that implied pleasure but often also created the impression that the participants would never actually specify – and that one would never, consequently, be able to say – what was ‘so good’ about the experience – namely, where this pleasure derives from and how exactly it is felt. In a considerable number of interviews, I eventually managed (usually with a request for some additional clarity) to go much more in-depth to an analysis of the respondents’ feelings. Thus, it was possible to finally understand and be able to illustrate the social aspects, social influences and impacts on the creation of these emotions.

Maggie said, in responding to my question on whether she perceives exercise to be discipline:

Study is discipline, university work is discipline, exercise is pleasure! Anything to do with exercise, walking, training, anything like that to me isn’t discipline. It’s part of my make up. It is something I love, I enjoy!

Katia also argued:

I mean, it is fun. Exercise is fun. It’s not work. I am being judged in all other fields of my life, when exercising I want to have fun, even if I look stupid, I don’t mind.

Kostas similarly admitted: “For me now exercise is pleasure, it’s a way of life”.

Ulrike agreed and added:

I mean it’s sort of addictive, once I started working out I couldn’t stop. I tend to do it more as a sort of enjoyment than a work out.

This feeling of pleasure for the interviewees usually derives from an acknowledgement of the long-term benefits of exercise – for instance, the health- or fitness-related ones. It is also the result of the enlargement of the body’s capacities

and the appreciation of this fact by the training individual him or herself. Kostas described an incident of arm-wrestling with a much more muscular acquaintance of his which took place some time after he had started exercising and which he won against everybody else's predictions. He said he knows that he was only able to do so because he was exercising at the time and he 'was happy' (an expression that I took as expressing pleasure, together with the use of verbs such as 'I enjoy', 'I have fun', 'I love'), because he could actually feel what he was capable of doing and his body was able to cope with it. In other words, it is the somehow quasi-autonomous feeling of challenge, achievement and accomplishment that make people enjoy exercise. Norman said:

I enjoy the feeling I get from it afterwards, because you know exercise hurts, makes you sweat, few people really enjoy that, I think. But it's the benefits you get afterwards from it that make it worthwhile ... a sense of accomplishment, the feeling that you come out and you've done something to improve your body and your mind.

Norman's comment however reflects something more. The reason behind his feeling of enjoyment has often to do with the fact that one has strived to adhere to something that society wants; to *achieve* in a project, one's very own body project. Norman's words reflect the existence of a broader emphasis placed upon people accomplishing things and achieving aims. Even under circumstances (as is exercise) where we may not expect to be judged as strictly or harshly as in others, it is important that we manifest this ability to manage and cope with different situations and deal with various challenges. A training session in the gym seems to be a training session for life in general, an exploration and acknowledgement of one's accomplishments and pleasures, Norman seems to imply and therefore he is happy to have done what he sets out to do every time¹⁰⁶. Ulrike expressed a similar view, on the rewarding feeling that exercise gives her every time she works "really, really hard".

¹⁰⁶ See relevant discussion of how different emotions might reflect the degree of our accomplishments in Scott (2004: 123). Drawing on shyness the author illustrates how emotions may be both personal experiences and social performances (2004: 128). Shyness reflects the fear of underachievement – the latter is believed to be unacceptable in our competitive worlds – points to the importance of achievement and to the high expectations of achievement that societies have of us. It is said further at a personal level to reflect the deprivation of the shy individual of one's 'emotional capital', which we may interpret as one's ties with the social group that would enable one to acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate one's achievements (2004: 123). Similar discussion in Shilling (1999: 558).

It is additionally the fact that people feel in charge of their bodies that makes them happy; makes them feel pleasure. Maria admitted that being able to control her body is what makes her feel good about exercise.

It is also the fact that one feels like ‘learning or acquiring a skill’ through training that makes some of the interviewees find pleasure in exercise. For Sherah, for example it is the fact that: “You know you can do something with your body; you can swim; you can box.” (Analogously, DP: 180).

It may also be the result of the ‘social’ character of the experience of exercise in the gym, namely of the fact that people meet other people there. Albert, Francis and Ulrike described how nice it is to exercise particularly if they go with their friends or meet their friends there. It is not only the fact that going to train with these other people motivates them to do the exercises but going to the gym is for these interviewees an opportunity to socialise, as well.

Pleasure is also, interviewees said, the effect of the music that one hears from the loudspeakers which makes them adjust easily to the discipline and keeps them upbeat, positive and energetic throughout the process of training (also, Sassatelli, 1999(a): 1.2.). Maggie argues:

For people to really get the results that they go for, they must at least enjoy the classes a bit because otherwise they are not going to continue for a long period of time.

Maggie’s comment (just like Sassatelli’s work) illustrates how discipline may keep operating on the basis of certain technologies, of which one may be music in the gym, and how these technologies can make the experience of training pleasurable.

Pleasure is also the outcome of the impact exercise has on the body itself (a ‘release of endorphins’, ‘an adrenaline kick’ – purely physiological, material experiences) rather than only deriving from people’s understanding that they have done their duty to make their bodies healthy, fit and so on. It is a kind of ‘instant gratification’ deriving from the ‘energy-boost’ (many characterised exercise also as ‘a buzz’) that one gets through exercise.

The interviewees’ words, in some way or another, remind us of Foucault and the emphasis he placed on the necessity to experience new things as he believed that it is only by doing so that we can live pleasure; the pleasure of seeing what we can

do, the pleasure of understanding our bodies as materials, the pleasure of knowing ourselves, the pleasure of understanding our relations with others and of making sense of our worlds (see relevant discussion in Robinson, 2003: 132-5).

Let me illustrate for the moment how this emotionality also became manifest through some incidents that interviewees described. That people enjoy exercise on the whole and continue to do it because they enjoy it was evident in their disappointment when a class has to be called off the last minute or if something unexpectedly prevented them from going to the gym. They admitted to becoming ‘grumpy’, ‘short-tempered’ and ‘stressed’, because this extra type of enjoyment is what many need in their lives just as much as being beautiful and healthy. Ulrike, Katia and Bruce expressed such opinions. All argued: “I get all upset when I don’t go”.

Such views might seem to rule out the idea that exercise continues to be discipline for these people. In that sense it might enable some to argue that Foucault has probably got his account on discipline wrong by presenting it as inescapable and aiming at constructing our bodies as docile. But interviewees, like Foucault, often admitted that “one can find pleasure and fun in discipline itself” (Norman).

In fact, it seems to me that on the basis of such an argument we can further presume that if discipline has indeed become pleasure for the interviewees, then these people have also managed to transgress the repressive aspects of disciplinary mechanisms that drive many to the gym and construct themselves as works of art. This is something that remains to be examined, of course, and I intend to do so in the following chapter. Yet, let me clarify one more issue here.

5.5.1. The Proliferation and Promotion of Pleasure

I have talked in the previous section about ‘pleasure’ as an aim in itself for which people train. Sherah said: “If I don’t enjoy it I don’t go. It’s like reading a book. If I don’t like the book, I stop reading it”. But I have also talked about the difficulties of identifying pleasure as an ideal. It may be worth taking a look then at how pleasure has come to constitute an ideal and what the pursuit of pleasure – difficult as it may be to identify – may signify.

In closing the previous section, I referred to the forces that have constructed as an ideal of beauty that of the firm, lean, controlled body. I said that this was the outcome of a certain paradox that characterises modern culture that is on the one hand oriented towards production and work and on the other towards consumerism. To my understanding, ‘pleasure’ could be associated mostly (albeit not solely) with the second element of this paradox, that of consumption, and reflects people’s desire to celebrate the many opportunities that the advance of capitalism, of science, of access to knowledge and the ability to consume give them (also, Bordo, 1990: 88). It may be mediated or negotiated by the existence of other forces (people enjoy exercise because it enables them to construct their bodies healthy, fit and beautiful), but one cannot but acknowledge that often this aim for pleasure overcomes the other imperatives of our culture (see, Katia’s comment that she does not mind it even if a particular form of exercise is ‘stupid’, as long as she enjoys it).

In this sense it would not be wrong, in my view, to talk about ‘pleasure’ in exercise as an aim equally supported and encouraged by our culture as the other ideals and as reflecting the multiple possibilities that our cultures open up for us. Leisure, recreation and pleasure are all supported by the capitalist regimes we live in and the need to consume leisure and pleasure by going to the gym and taking advantage of the many opportunities that this regime gives us, is something that equally targets our minds but writes its effect on our bodies. The case of exercise is a good reflection of this.

5.6. The Body that Society Needs

Show me how you are running,
and I can see something of the society in which you are living.
(Eichberg, 1998: 163)

The data analysed in this chapter enable us precisely to do this; to identify something of the society in which we are living – or, to put it in a Foucauldian manner, to understand and show what body our society needs. The fact that going to the gym has turned into an important aspect of culture, as many of the interviewees

admitted, allows us to understand better what the subjection of the body to this kind of discipline is about.

I have presented so far various types of body (and embodiment) that our cultures promote: healthy, beautiful, fit bodies, bodies of pleasure – and the more particular attributes of these ‘embodiments’.

However, the toned, slim, fit, muscular, more athletic, leaner, more active, younger looking are not simply variant types of bodies that interviewees appreciate. The need to construct their bodies in these ways signifies something more. This is what interviewees clearly acknowledged at times – the need that our bodies are ‘worked on’, ‘not let go’, ‘looked after’ and ‘taken care of’. In other words, interviewees need to make their bodies ‘projects’ and not treat them simply as materials that carry them around.

Norman emphasized the need that one shows that “one cares about one’s body” and further noted that it is respected when people are making some effort with their bodies – that they try to make themselves better. He said:

First time I ever bench-pressed at two hundred pounds, that was a good feeling because I am not that big a guy and doing that amount of weight is considered pretty respectable, so that made me feel good.

Maggie, in talking about people who resort to cosmetic surgery, commented similarly on this need to work with one’s body:

[T]he people who are very large, I don’t like the idea of that they just eat whatever they want and then they just go and have a plastic surgery rather than working out in the gym and putting a bit of effort in it. Going to have liposuction to get the fat off their body instead of working out and eating a sensible diet; I don’t believe in that kind of plastic surgery.

She added:

I find people have a lot more respect for people who take care of themselves. I find that being true that you get a great deal of respect if you look after your body because people think, ‘oh, that person worked really hard to keep fit, they eat a healthy diet’. You have to take care of

the body that you're living in for the rest of your life ... I think it's an excuse to say I am too big I can't lose weight.

Ulrike remembered and characterised as 'good' a personal experience from exercise because the hard work she had put into doing well in a class came to be acknowledged in the end with her instructor's comment. She demonstrates that it was expected of her to work hard and she was rewarded for the fact that she had done so with the following compliment, which made her feel 'very nice' about herself:

I went to my circuits class and was quite tired but I really did my best and after the class the instructor came up to me and said he was really impressed. He said: 'I think you've been working really, really hard and it's really good to see someone that works hard'. And that gives you a push and it's good to know that it's acknowledged that you perform well.

She highlighted the value of hard work and of constructing one's body through hard work.

The previous comments by the interviewees seem to signify that this is also the type of body that society needs; an admittedly demanding society, a society in which hard work is a virtue. In this society the body has to be worked on, has to reflect that one is a hard-working person.

Norman added that he likes the experience of exercise not only because it gives him a body like that. He feels good about having subjected himself to discipline because:

I've gone out and done something substantial; it's the idea of the virtuous working man, you know.

His comment is probably on the spot, illustrating what body society needs, no matter what the particular reasons may be that one trains for.

That people want to look able to cope with everything and work hard, that they want to be achievers and that their bodies can manage is also evident in the interviewees' fear of looking incompetent. Betty said that she doesn't usually go to the front of the class because if she makes a mistake she does not want people to think that she is "rubbish". Norman added that he wants to be able to do anything:

It's about being a capable human being, being able to slap my laptop into my backpack and walk to my office and being able to run up the stairs; that's a good feeling. Coming home with the groceries and not getting tired; on the whole not having limitations on the things I can do, the places I can go.

He seems further to imply that a body which is worked on is also 'useful' in a Foucauldian manner – is able to produce, to partake in this process of society's development and advance. Similarly, Katia said, "I want my body to cope with everything", and justified also in this manner the fact that when she goes to the gym she aims for programmes that give one a total workout. This is something that instructors often also mark. These programmes are said to be more effective precisely because they are so designed to make one and one's whole body able to cope with almost everything.

So, whether beautiful, healthy, fit or otherwise the body has to be worked on. What matters is a 'hard worker's' body which is the only body that can be presumed to be also an achiever's body (Coward, 1989: 44, 46, 63; Klein, 1993: 148¹⁰⁷); a body 'capable' of 'performing whatever task or activity', 'coping with whatever comes up in life', becoming 'ever better' in terms of health, appearance, fitness and giving ever more pleasure to the person to whom it belongs. This is the body that is, ultimately, very highly valued seems to be the body that current society needs.

It is a body whose energies and resources are not being 'wasted' but 'utilised' constantly (analogously, DP, 1977: 26, 54; THS, vol. 1: 114, Coward, 1989: 61). This body is in a Foucauldian sense a work of art because it can offer something to all and has been through a process that has examined its 'fragility' (THS: vol. 3, 122) but also gradually enhanced its capacities. In an era in which production and efficiency are mostly appreciated and valued, this type of body is an essential component of society.

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate what power relations are and how they force or induce people to treat their bodies in certain ways. I have found

¹⁰⁷ Klein argues that for his bodybuilder interviewees "[i]njury and illness are anathema, an admission of having failed to do things properly".

answers to these questions by asking my interviewees to tell me the reasons why they exercise. I have managed to show that there are indeed many reasons why people subject themselves to training; many more than the literature often suggests. And that these forces affect men like women. I have shown that behind the need to construct their bodies as healthy, fit and beautiful or as bodies of pleasure, people revealed the need to constantly work on their bodies, to make their bodies projects. This underlying imperative has been in my view significant in helping us understand also what kind of body our society – a demanding society – needs. This is a body that can cope with everything, with all social change, and a body that can help society progress.

6. Power in Operation, Discipline at Work, 'Ethical' Training and the Body as Lived

In this chapter, I attempt to identify the modes of operation of power. I examine to what extent Foucault's description of the particulars of discipline and of the operation and effects of power are reflected in and validated by what interviewees claim. The key concepts in the Foucauldian theory that I look at here are: the operation of power in institutional settings; the technologies of discipline and control such as surveillance, repetition of activities and timetables; the carceral effect and the impact of discipline on the body. I attempt also to show how the exercising body is lived by regular gym-goers and how it, in its materiality, experiences exercise. In addition, there are also the matter of knowledge and the notions of excess and the ethical construction of the self as presented by Foucault in the third volume of the HS that I investigate. I examine the extent to which these notions are understood and evaluated by interviewees themselves and how they become manifest in the ways people train and treat their bodies.

6.1. Exercise as Discipline

I have shown already (sections 4.3., 4.3.1.) that for many outsiders to gym culture, including myself in the early phases of this project, it seemed that training is a rigid form of discipline, even a punishment that people subject themselves to, because they feel that their bodies are not structured according to the existing norms of appearance (as I initially thought) or additionally health, fitness and pleasure.

However, this impression that training is at times a repressing and oppressive, even punitive, process also often emerged from the participants' narratives. Interviewees used expressions such as "I've been naughty" to describe an evening out during which they might have drunk or eaten more than usual and admitted feelings of guilt. Many also said they would normally prioritise the gym over other social events. They reveal thus the importance that exercise (as discipline) has for them. They expect that by exercising they are going to make up for the fact that they

may have ‘deviated’ from the norms of appearance, health and so on. Betty, for instance, said:

I’m going away on the weekends and I’m eating too much and drinking and then I am feeling guilty and then I think: ‘I will have to go to the gym seven times next week because I have been really bad’. I am thinking I am only going to stick to my diet and I am going to eat fish and vegetables and meat and salad and let nothing evil pass my lips again because I’ve been really naughty and it was really good to go out and drink but, you know I feel bad for it and I don’t like feeling hung-over by going out and drinking.

Betty is not the only one who feels ‘bad’ about something that many non-gym goers would probably see as a typical everyday way of enjoying life. Barbara, Diana, Maria and Lisa all expressed similar opinions and described the fact that they might have indulged themselves in a ‘nice glass of wine’ or a ‘nice meal’ equally as ‘naughtiness’. They also admitted that they feel guilty afterwards as they realise that this behaviour might lead them to gain weight or might prove detrimental to their health or mood overall, even for a short while, in the form of a hangover. As their statements in the previous chapter indicate, they believe that they should place emphasis on their health, looks, fitness, because these are the ideals one should aspire to. The little decadences that they often resort to are deviations from what is deemed to be the norm. Exercise is discipline – and indeed so in a Foucauldian sense – because it helps one comply with social norms, some clearly claim. Diana said she has always been the ‘chubbier’ of three children in the family and felt bad because she “wanted to be like everybody else. I didn’t want to stand out”.

Turning back to Betty’s comment, it is important to add that not all participants react as passionately as she does to the fact that they might every now and then be self-indulgent. Neither do most of the interviewees speak of exercise as a ‘necessary evil’. In fact, on occasions they argued that they saw exercise more as a “treat” that enables them to enjoy other aspects of their life more and not feel as guilty. Lisa said characteristically:

It’s a treat. I’m unlucky or lucky – it depends how you look at it. I have a husband who can eat whatever he wants and never put on weight and it’s quite difficult because ... we eat out a lot and I don’t want to go out and sit and have a lettuce sandwich or just a salad. I like to go

out with him and I like food. And if the way to be able to do that, to be able to go out and eat with my husband, since we both enjoy it, if the way is exercise, then that's fine. I need to do the exercise.

Even in this narrative, though, the message is the same; that exercise makes up for the violation of a standard of appearance. Lisa is not particularly slim, we may recall.

That some interviewees react to these violations in more intense and heartfelt ways whereas others have milder reactions depends in part on the kind of pressures exercised on them in/by their social environments. Lisa's husband, for instance, never seemed to have minded the fact that she is slightly overweight. In fact, according to his culture (he comes from Northern Africa) a bit of fat on a woman is very much appreciated and, even, desired. Lisa thus does not feel in any way pressured to lose any significant amount of weight. She describes an interesting incident with her husband's family, which indicates precisely that if Lisa had to care about her weight, it would have to be about not losing any rather than not gaining some. When she and her husband went to visit her in-laws in his hometown a few months after their wedding, Lisa was a couple of stones lighter. She described their reaction. Everyone exclaimed: "Oh, my God, look at you! You are so skinny now", whereas Lisa felt she could be described as anything but skinny. Betty, on the other hand, has grown up in and continues to be affected by a culture that promotes the slim, toned female ideal. In addition to this, her competitive character formed through years of training for rowing championships, and evident also in that she never wants to look as if she is unable to do something (see sections 4.6. and 5.6.), would seem to allow for nothing but an intense reaction to her frequent indulgences.

This brings us back to the issue of exercise as discipline. There are a number of other expressions that interviewees use which prove that they do indeed consider exercise to be a form of discipline. When I asked them about how they saw exercise, the majority of them told me clearly: "It's discipline, because I do it for a purpose". So argued James, for example; the purpose for him being to get fitter. 'It is something that has to be done', 'something that one has to do' many also admitted, even if it becomes 'fun' after a while. Others said:

It's not a hobby; for me a hobby is something that doesn't involve any kind of sweating. It's something that works at a different level. I think going to the gym is something I should do and sometimes I want to do as well; well if I don't want to go I just don't go but it starts as something I should do. If there was any other possibility of having the same results without going to the gym I wouldn't do it; I wouldn't go. (Katia)

The excitement people feel when training should not be seen as invalidating Foucault's arguments about the operation of discipline and power; nor should it be seen as implying that people who enjoy exercise are the escapees of power nexuses. On the contrary, the above quotes illustrate precisely that it is where power and discipline operate that pleasure may also develop, as Foucault would argue. Let me add some more to these views that interviewees hold about the nature and purpose of exercise.

That exercise is a form of control is apparent not only in the fact that people feel they have to do it, or that they believe that they do not do enough of it (as their duty would be¹⁰⁸), but also in their statements that they often do not feel like doing it. The majority of the gym users admit that on many occasions they have to struggle before they actually persuade themselves to go and work out: 'sometimes I have to persuade myself', 'sometimes I feel I can't move [to the gym]', 'when I'm on the bus and I have to get off at the gym, most of the times I feel like continuing on the bus and going home', 'when I am in the gym I am fine, it's just organizing my time beforehand that I find difficult', 'sometimes it's like hell doing the exercises'. These are very common expressions that interviewees use to describe training, in spite of the fact that the majority of them also say that they have a 'rewarding' feeling when it is over.

Even the fact that to define exercise people use the phrase to 'work out' signifies something about the character of the process. The phrase also marks the existence of this ethic of 'work' which I discussed in section 5.6., which exists in society and which is reflected in all the different ways the participants in the study treat their bodies.

However, what is strikingly obvious is that people still go to the gym, regardless of the fact that they know that exercise means regulation. Indeed this fact

¹⁰⁸ Many of the interviewees admitted that they felt they were not exercising 'as much as they should'.

implies something more; that these people are already disciplined enough to be there. They are already caught in the nexuses of power.

There are yet further questions that one would need to ask about this notion of discipline. Interviewees may say that exercise is discipline, but do they actually attribute the same meaning to the word that Foucault did in his writings, even though they might never have heard of the French philosopher? Are they able to acknowledge the disciplinary technologies that he speaks about in DP or THS? To reverse the question: can we claim that Foucault has got his analysis of the concept of discipline and power right, on the basis of what these interviewees say?

For the purpose, let us remember some of the notions that Foucault associates with discipline: these are spatiality, the regulation of time, the regulation of one's activities, the gaze, surveillance, the control of minds and the capture and regulation of bodies. Could one identify information in interviewees' narratives which would help us to understand and interpret these notions, as used by Foucault? Could we identify information that could help us interpret his abstract works in a more grounded manner?

I attempted to find answers to these questions by prompting interviewees to tell me more specifically how they feel about exercise, what they feel when they exercise, how they feel in the environment of the gym, how they actually perceive the gym environment, if they are aware of everything that happens in there or are simply concentrating on their own work. I have asked them to describe to me things that they may notice when training and tell me how they exercise.

It is now time to see how they describe these things. In order to help me illuminate their narratives, I enrich this analysis with some additional details from my field notes at the time of observation.

6.2. The Particulars of Discipline

6.2.1. Spatiality

I have argued that the gym is a site that resembles the Panopticon (section 4.3.). It is a closed area, a minority place where few of us go. It is further a place of

the control of the mind and the body¹⁰⁹. “I was entering this ghetto” Kostas said remembering the first time he arrived at the gym, pointing precisely to the fact that this is a distinctively restricted area with its own rules, regulations and ‘mentality’ or culture.

The gym is additionally a place that works on the basis of the technology of surveillance. Despite certain differences in construction between the individual exercise venues that I joined for the purposes of this study, I also noticed a number of very striking similarities. Each site has a large reception hall. It is there that the separation between the clients and non-members takes place. A new order is to be found once one crosses this area¹¹⁰. It is at the reception that a clear barrier is usually raised for one who wishes to enter the venue and there that exclusion and the control of one’s identity (as an insider or outsider) become manifest. “Are you ready to leave your life outside and join in?” the person at the reception asked me when I went to enroll at the OLYMPICO, pointing to the fact that from the moment that I entered the place I was going to experience life differently. The people at the reception are the last of the outsiders, one could argue.

Indeed having passed by them, members find themselves in an area from where they can proceed, following a number of corridors, to the changing rooms or the various exercise rooms. Depending on the structure of each building, these spaces may be found on one or on different levels. Symmetry, then, does not seem to be an essential characteristic of the structure of the site – at first glance, at least. On the contrary, it is more likely that to any newcomer the gym seems to have the perplexing organization of a labyrinth. How, then, can one say that this place is controlled in any way, and how can the control of different behaviours be facilitated within it?

The description so far seems to divert from or even go against the standards of the Panopticon with its cyclical, symmetrical build. But then again, this is not to say that this disrupts the operation of disciplinary technologies, particularly the gaze in this institution. In each area of the gym there are always people who survey what happens. They are usually a different group of staff from those at the reception. In

¹⁰⁹ On space perceived as a mechanism of regulation and control and on buildings operating as structures of control, see also Halford, 2004: 1.2, 2.1.

¹¹⁰ Analogous example and comments in Latour, 1992: 228.

their absence, special equipment takes up the role of the 'eye'. Not always noticeable at first behind or next to the reception there is usually a 'staff room' or the 'duty manager's' room. It is this space that comes to resemble the central watchtower of the Benthamite construction. Numerous monitors on its walls receive images from cameras hidden in different parts of the premises and inform anyone who might be occupying this small space of what is happening in each of the areas of the gym. This form of surveillance takes place in addition to the 'patrols' that the members of staff take around the rooms to make sure that everything is in order and works properly and smoothly and that no one needs any assistance with anything. One could say, of course, that these people are not actually concerned with what the gym users are doing. They do not seem to be directly concerned with the ways people exercise or treat their bodies. They are merely trying to secure the proper functioning of the institution as such. This is only partly true, however. Indirectly, these people control our behaviour within the environment and always make sure that we use it only for the purposes that it is designed to serve. They guarantee a loose sense of control and make us believe that should anything go wrong, they will be able to prevent it or help with it. And it might be worth mentioning that some of these people – the guardians as it were – are often qualified instructors themselves, who usually help with the clients' induction sessions and teach them the basics of exercise and training. Although they also have administrative and other duties related more to the maintenance of the place and its security, they are not solely servitors of the space, but also (albeit less directly), of our bodies.

Gym patrols are very much like the penitentiary guards. The latter are not concerned exactly about how inmates carry out their obligations or learn to comply with and follow the normal type of behaviour. Inmates of the penitentiary, as we have seen, internalise and follow these norms on their own. This is precisely the point that Foucault makes about the panoptical effect: that guardians do not watch us in reality and yet we live under the presumption that we may be constantly observed by them. It is actually that we police ourselves – we do whatever we believe we have to do each time, whatever we are influenced to do, whatever we have gradually learnt to appreciate as a social norm (see sections 2.1.2. and 2.1.3.). In the case of the users

of the gym, it is the ideals described in the previous chapter that people follow, regardless of who guards them in the gym.

All the above (the structure of the place, the presence of these people whom I have named ‘guardians’) testify to the fact that the gym is, indeed, an isolated and controlled area in itself, much like the Panopticon. As I have also just argued, though, the gym is primarily a place where people can exercise discipline and control upon themselves, on their own. The technologies by which users of the services learn to police themselves and check their performance in this space of the gym include mirrors¹¹¹ and the monitors attached to the machines.

The mirrors are the most basic and significant type of ‘decoration’ in the gym. There people can see themselves and check if they are doing the exercises correctly. This is also the case with many pieces of equipment that have monitors to measure one’s performance. What I noticed was that people often would in fact leave machines which were not working properly (i.e. the monitors were out of order¹¹²) to continue their training on others, where they could check constantly what they were doing and were aware of what they should still do. Luke and Lisa reported, for instance, that they preferred to use machines when training because they could always see what they had accomplished. Luke said:

I like the gym and I like using the machines rather than going to classes because you have the statistics of what you’ve done right in front of you, on the screen.

Lisa also argued: “I know I need to burn say, 500 calories and I know when I have achieved that”. Their behaviour seemed to confirm the idea of self-policing as used by Foucault, and reveals how the organisation of the space and the operation of the appliances themselves play an important role in this process of self-regulation.

¹¹¹ Mirrors are part of what Halford would call the ‘micro-organisation of space’; they are things at the level of furniture and décor (2.2). That is why they have been included under the heading of space. I could have included the posters under this category but the posters are better to be seen in my view as extensions of the technology of gaze. I will justify this at the relevant point and will illustrate interviewees’ practices of resistance against the ‘powerful’ messages these posters convey.

¹¹² On the importance of looking at nonhumans and artifacts (such as space and appliances) in this case the machines in the gym and how they facilitate the discipline of our bodies, see also Latour, 1992: 226-7.

As I showed earlier, apart from the organisation of the bigger areas or of how people operate the machines, what I would also take notes on were also things like the specific location of the machines and the placement of the various pieces of equipment in the training rooms. At the earlier stages of my study, I thought that recording this kind of information could prove additionally useful. I thought it might be important to try to understand why the machines stood in the places they did. I noticed a roughly circular placement of them in the exercise rooms. This reminded me again of the Panopticon and the circular layout of the cells around the central watchtower. Only this time every room was a small Panopticon. I also noticed, however, that most of the machines that had monitors on them where one could measure one's performance alone – like steppers, rowers, treadmills and elliptical trainers – would most usually be facing outwards, towards walls, mirrors and windows, creating the impression that one is moving towards infinity. This was, I thought, because people were able to see what they were actually doing. By contrast, those weights machines and other pieces of equipment for the exercise of the upper body, which did not have monitors, faced mostly inwards, ensuring one's performance by exposing one to the visibility of others, thus forcing one to exercise more rigorously. I thought no one would like to be seen standing on a piece of equipment particularly at a peak hour and have it seem as if s/he had not been working out hard or seriously enough. In any case, regardless of the orientation of the machines, it was clear that the control of each person's training behaviour was in principle always possible.

However, the organisation of the space in the manner described here did not only discipline individuals but, as was evident, further provided them with a sense of security, a feeling that their aims for exercising are going to be accomplished. Maggie provided an interesting comment in relation to this, which reveals the importance of organised space in the promotion of this feeling as well as of discipline. When I asked her where she usually chooses to stand when she is attending a class – my question was actually aiming at measuring and showing people's awareness of the possibility that they may be the object of the gaze of others and their feelings about such a possibility; Maggie answered in a way that differed from previous interviewees' responses. She said:

A: I think people are very territorial. If you watch them, all people tend to go to the same places every week. They're like: 'it's my little space'. I found this to be true when I was teaching classes myself; I could turn around and I could know who was standing and at what spot. I think that's what it is, I think you feel safe.

Q: Safe in what sense?

A: I don't know. I think it's a routine. Exercise tends to be a routine and people like to know exactly where they are standing in the class and what they are doing. If you watch people's spaces they don't really like to change very much. They don't like to change their exercise routine much ... They are used to do what they are used to; they like routine.

Her comment demonstrates not only how space comes to be an important aspect of the whole disciplinary process but also how in exercising individuals' minds it plays an important role, too. It becomes part of a process which interviewees expect to guarantee them the meeting of their standards, a process for which only they are responsible and in control. It reveals, additionally, how mechanically and automatically people do everything.

The fact that 'spatiality' matters in the process of exercise was apparent also in the distress that the arrival of newcomers in the class often brought about when they occupied a space that 'belonged' to some member of the group who had been attending a programme for longer. "Oh, my place is taken" would often be a comment, and something like "yeah, but they may not come next week" or "well, we'll be here earlier next time and make sure that they won't take your space" or agreements like "whoever comes first will keep some space for both of us" would be immediately presented to 'console' the person whose routine had been disrupted. Guaranteeing somebody's space was becoming a common issue for the more regular members of the classes.

That the gym as a space organised for exercise also imposes a certain mode of conduct and disciplines people was further evident in that many of the people I interviewed said that they do not go to the gym to socialize – they go to train (Bruce).

What was apparent to me after all these observations and comments was how difficult it was for someone to escape discipline in a space organized like the gym. One could not avoid placing one's body under regulation, be it in a class or

exercising on one's own. The monitoring of the training process and of people's attitudes towards their bodies could be easily achieved in such a space and this was indeed the case.

6.2.2. The Regulation of Time

Attending the gym and exercising demand that one subjects oneself not only to the obligation of going to an organised space that provides the relevant facilities, but also that one follows rigid timetables, just as the inmates of the penitentiary in DP would do (see section 2.1.2.). The regulation of one's time is a prerequisite and an effect at the same time of the operation of discipline. One has to organise one's time in advance and be at the gym at a certain time, particularly where classes are concerned.

To enable people to exercise and help them reach their aims through training, the gym stays open for up to sixteen hours per day. A look at the daily class timetable verifies that the institution will go to considerable lengths to provide its services to as many individuals as possible and accommodate the needs of its ever growing numbers of participants of all ages, backgrounds and professions. Peak hours, as I have shown, are considered those outside the working hours of the majority of the population, namely before 9 a.m. (indeed some of the interviewees admit that there were times in their lives when they would be going to the gym at 7 o'clock in the morning before work) and after 5 p.m. This is usually when the 'latest fashion' classes were scheduled, so that the majority can attend them. These classes are also available at other times throughout the day. Diana said: "The BodyPump is very popular so they have got it scheduled many times during the week and that suits me".

That the existence of timetables facilitates discipline is evident in the fact that many people admitted that it is too rigid to have to be at the gym at a certain time in order to attend a class: "Classes demand you to be there at a certain time and I like flexibility", Norman argued. Luke expressed a similar view (see section 4.6.).

This (that they prefer to be flexible) is not to say though that these people are less disciplined because, as Jonathan revealed, "in regulating one's time in order to

go to the gym”, even if one is to train on one’s own, without having to follow any rigid timetable, “one learns to organise one’s life overall”; one learns to discipline all one’s life and subject it to regulation.

Even a comment like Bruce’s makes it apparent that temporal regulation is an important aspect of discipline. He said at first:

To me [exercise] is not so much discipline because ... I do not say I am going to go to the gym on Wednesday at seven every week. I just go when I feel like it, I go when I want to go.

But he added later on, giving an interpretation similar to Jonathan’s about being able to regulate one’s life on the whole, through regulating one’s time:

I see too many people that come to the gym and they may come for an hour and may speak to people half way through of what they are doing and end up spending half of their time training and half of the time talking. I don’t like that but I mean I would speak to them but then I would end up missing things that I actually set myself for going to the gym. Because I work all day and I have kids, my time is precious, so I don’t go there to speak to such and such for half an hour.

It is evident then that for him as for others, time is an important aspect of discipline. People need to plan their time in advance in order to be able to enjoy a number of other things in life, as well. We might want to recall also Diana’s disappointment if classes are cancelled (section 4.6.). This time the disruption of routine comes from a violation of a timetable.

6.2.3. Regulation of Activities, Routine, Repetition

That the gym is a disciplinary institution becomes most apparent in the way it subjects people’s bodies to certain tasks and activities, and indeed repeatedly so (analogously, section 2.1.2. on the operation of the Panopticon). In the gym one has to learn certain moves. One is taught how to control one’s stance and posture; how to hold the weights in a particular way or how to position or move one’s arms and legs in a specifically prescribed manner; how to breathe in and out correctly so that exercise becomes less dangerous, easier and much more effortless. “Don’t let your

wrists bend; this is not right; you are going to hurt yourselves!” and “always exhale on the effort” are some of the instructions often given, which aim at regulating every muscle’s movement.

The body in the gym is treated both in its parts (legs, arms, chest, shoulders, back etc) and as a whole. Exercise programmes such as the body training systems that give a ‘total workout’ are considered much more effective than others, such as the usual aerobic exercises, which many instructors admit are ‘weak’ because they “only work your heart-rate” (Constance) and “don’t make one really fit” (Bruce), “[whereas] the Body Training systems go over the whole body, you’re getting a complete workout, so you know it’s going to be effective” (Constance). Regardless of their type and degree of difficulty, all programmes demand discipline: they demand that one follows certain patterns of behaviour and require the attention, co-ordination and devotion of all participants. Indeed, the fact that many of the training programmes are choreographed reveals the importance of being very careful and learning to do things properly. ‘Being careful’ is a demand that is common for all programmes including those that one is supposed to follow on one’s own (interviewees have shown to us how significant it is to train with caution, by saying that they always want to avoid injury).

Repetition of a number of different moves and gestures guarantees that exercise is learnt correctly. It helps one ‘get the technique right’. But in group exercises routines change every three months or so, so that new techniques are learnt and one gets used to doing different things. And when one is exercising on one’s own, one is also advised to change one’s patterns every now and then – to add some more exercises, to try other machines or to lift heavier weights – so that the body does not get used to the movements and feels as if it is doing no exercise after a while (see Bruce’s comment in section 5.3.1.).

The music heard through the loudspeakers helps make the repetition of routines enjoyable and easier to remember and follow. This is particularly important as some programmes are especially intense and rigorous for those who are not used to them. “Don’t panic, if you can’t follow at all times, guys. I know it’s hard at the beginning but you will get it eventually”, Constance usually encouraged us. Her words were consoling in that they implied that through repetition one would eventually be able to

do these routines and would become able to perform whatever one was asked to more easily and efficiently. A further implication was that one would be able to do so not only in terms of exercise in the gym but also in one's life. This seems to be after all what most interviewees want to achieve (section 5.6.): to be able to perform in all things and enable their bodies to help them carry out whatever is demanded of them.

6.2.4. Gaze and the Promotion of Discipline: The Control of the Mind, the Internalisation of Norms, the Standardisation of Behaviour

As I have already argued (sections 4.3., 5.2.2., 5.3.1., 5.4.3. and 5.5.1.), the existence of the gym is somehow legitimated and is based on the broader operation of the technology of the gaze in society in general. It is because people want to be seen, because they are also aware of the fact that they are being looked at, to be complying with the existing social rules about their bodies that they go to the gym in the first place. In people's talk we may identify the significant role that the technology of the gaze plays in enforcing certain norms upon us. Interviewees' narratives verify what Foucault says about surveillance being an enabling condition of the operation of power (also sections 2.1.2. and 2.1.3.). As a result of gazing – which penetrates the whole social field and creates either the desire to look a certain way or the fear of being punished and facing isolation for not looking a certain way, some of us end up at the gym and taking up exercise. This is how power operates¹¹³. It forces us to internalize the norms of appearance or health or fitness by 'showing' us certain models of behaviour and by exposing us to the visibility of others. We might recall Maria's comment that: "you don't want the rest of the country to see that you are in an appalling state" when going to the beach and feel that you have violated all standards of appearance, for example (section 5.4.3.).

People want to look nice, be fit and healthy and to seem to be deriving pleasure from what they are doing in order to be accepted by their peers, friends, families, employers or prospective lovers. Training individuals have internalised

¹¹³ As power is multifarious, however, the ideals formerly described can be pursued by other people, who do not go to the gym, in a number of other ways. Because power takes many forms the carceral continuum can be flexible. This is also evident in the various approaches to training that develop in the gym, too.

these standards, as they are constantly reminded of them by the media, their peers and so on. As Constance said, explaining how she became anorexic:

It's the same old scenario with teenagers and magazines. You see a physique that you like and you think: 'I want to be like that and I will be like that' and you cannot understand that your body shape is completely different.

Maria admitted, that caring about her appearance "is very much a peer pressure issue". People do things because others around them do them or tell them they should do them. And she continued: "I do it because I want to be accepted". Kostas also said he used to exercise because he wanted to be liked by his peers.

Trevor showed how men can also be influenced nowadays by the media and fashion industries (although as I have emphasised several times already these are not the only or the most important disciplinarians):

I suppose a lot of women are under pressure because of the whole glamour thing, the whole model thing. You know women think they have to look slim in order to look gorgeous. A lot of men think that as well.

He added:

There are more men's health magazines as well as more men's fashion magazines, so men are more aware of basic things like hair products, shampoo, a lot of creaming products, shaving products, an amazing range of clothes that they can buy, shoes, etc.

Recent studies in the field verify his comments (see, Grogan and Richards, 2002: 219).

The role of surveillance, of the fear of the public eye, the public gaze (as of discipline overall) is also evident in the spread of disciplinary technologies to people's private spheres. This spread is also signified by and identified in the fact that many of us choose to bring the discipline of exercise home. Lisa said she was thinking of buying a treadmill to put in some empty room in her house so that she can exercise there in addition to the gym. Similarly, Maria admitted to be exercising a lot more at home now that she lives farther away from the UNIVERSAL and she

cannot make use of the facilities as often as she would like to or did in the past. Both revealed the need to police themselves even when alone, to make sure that they can make their bodies firm, fit and toned, as they believe the people around them expect them to be constructed. Many confirmed how well they have internalised these norms that even when told by their friends, peers or partners that they ‘look perfect’, they are still going to police themselves and feel unsatisfied until they have met their aims. “The way I see myself and the way others see me is completely different” argued Francis. Others stated that they feel their partners are telling them how good they look, mainly, out of courtesy:

My husband sometimes tells me I don’t need to go to the gym as much. He probably thinks I’m a super-model or something. He mistakes me for Cindy Crawford. He must be blind.
(Katia)

Along similar lines, although in a more aggressive tone, Maria commented:

Well, he’s my boyfriend; in a sense, he is bound to tell me I look good. He doesn’t want to be sleeping on the sofa at night.

As I will show later, some other interviewees’ comments seem to imply that the gaze is not always an inescapable technology and possibly that its effects are much milder and much more mildly perceived than Foucault suggests in DP. As I will argue eventually though, this does not necessarily mean that we are able to break out of power completely but rather that the carceral network of which we are all part, is flexible and allows us to feel, experience and pursue discipline in different ways. There are parts of the exercising individuals’ narratives, for example, that illustrate that the possibility of being exposed to the gaze of others generates fear; or that its effects are indeed powerful and control people’s minds and force them to exercise or diet. At a practical level and in the course of training, this fear may become apparent when people do not want to be seen by others as violating or not knowing the rules of exercise. Betty does not want to stand at the front of the class:

because in case I make a mistake I don’t want anybody to think: ‘look at her; she is rubbish’.

I will now more specifically illustrate that the gym is a place that constantly recreates power as operating on the basis of this very technology of gaze. In trying to measure the interviewees' consciousness with regard to being looked at, I asked them to tell me whether they look at what other people do in the various exercise rooms and whether they feel they might be the objects of observation themselves.

Many admitted that they look at other people but do so 'because there is often nothing else to do'. They added 'the machines are placed that way, so that you cannot do anything but look to the people opposite to you and they look back at you'¹¹⁴. They continued that they were not particularly conscious about the fact, though, or 'neutralised' the idea of 'being looked at for the purpose of being looked at' by thinking that there is nothing else to do but look.

Others, however, clearly said: "I am conscious, just because I am looking at other people myself but I don't mind" (Norman).

That gazing is not merely or not always done because there is nothing else to do, but is consciously enacted, is obvious in that people approach others and ask them questions about exercise on the basis of what they have seen others do. The ultimate aim is to enhance their own performance but the very fact that they ask others for instructions, presupposes that they are aware of what others do (they see) and also are aware of the fact that others are doing things better than they are (they compare themselves to others). Norman said:

When I first went to the gym there was always going to be somebody who was in better shape, who'd have been doing this for longer and you just look at guys and girls and you're like, 'ok, they're doing that, they're in good shape, they've got pretty developed muscles, that looks like an interesting technique, maybe I'll do that.

He continued:

¹¹⁴ This may also verify what I have said before about the allocation of the machines in space and how it is designed to promote discipline also by exposing one to the visibility of others.

I might see a guy with a well built body and see that he has been lifting weights in such and such a way, I'll go and ask him: 'This seems to be working out for you, can you show me how to do it?' People have come to me too and asked me the same.

Kostas also reported:

Yes, younger people would come and ask me things about how to do the exercise right, particularly newcomers at the gym, because I had been working out there for a long time and I was also one of them. I wasn't an instructor but they looked up to me, as I did when I started up to other people. Because I had been training for longer, I was the easy target for them to ask these questions. Rather than going to an instructor they would come to me because I was at their age but also had more experience than them.

That the technology of the gaze facilitates discipline and enables people to reach their aims is also evident in that many people consciously subject themselves to it by choosing to attend classes. Many interviewees (Lisa, Barbara, Ulrike, Diana) admitted that they lack motivation and therefore go to classes because they 'can see other people doing the same thing' and thus push themselves. Furthermore, they like the idea of having an instructor because 'instructors can show you and make sure you do things right'. These facts point to what I mentioned early in this study about the gaze being, as Foucault would also say, a superlative technology to the service of discipline and power.

There would be finally people who would actually pursue being looked at by others. "I would go and stand at the front" Albert replied to my question concerning where he would pick to stand in a class. "Because I have worked so much on my body and I am proud of it and I wouldn't mind people looking at me". "He wants to be desired" his partner, Trevor, commented later.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, the point about the gaze is not only that one is exposed to the visibility of others, but also that because one is exposed to the visibility of others one eventually comes to look at and always monitor one's own behaviour. I have shown how this may be technically achieved in the Nautilus room or the weights' area where one may look at oneself in the mirrors or check one's own performance on the monitor screens attached on the machines.

However, many of the interviewees verified that the same thing happens when people train in groups. Contrary to what one would normally expect, that people in classes would feel directly exposed to the gaze of the instructors, participants in these programmes are equally self-policed as other gym goers and admit that all that happens in the dance and exercise rooms – with the music, the choreography and so on – makes the policing of themselves much easier. Lisa said:

In classes I normally don't look at what other people do. I concentrate on my thing because I am trying to keep track of my time and the choreography; so I don't think a lot of looking at others goes on in the class. And with everyone else I feel very much I am on a par; I mean they might be lifting 20 kilos more but I don't notice that; I feel I am on a par, whereas in the gym ... you can tell if somebody is stronger than you or something.

Instructors as well often advise us to look at ourselves in the mirror rather than at them in order to make sure that we do the exercises properly. Their advice implies the necessity of self-regulation, precisely for the purpose of our learning to do things correctly and according to the standards expected of us.

As I have shown, not even instructors can escape the gaze and this is not only because they are meant to stand out in front of the crowd in the class. It is because they are subjected to the same imperatives of power as everybody else. They are not themselves the people in power. Undoubtedly, they judge our performance, because they are more knowledgeable and qualified, but this is not the same as arguing that they are the people in power (see similarly, Connor et al, 2004: 498, 505 on school teachers and the contestation of the idea that teachers are actually the people in power). Bruce, Constance and David as people/parts of the institution quite adamantly showed with their narratives how they are also subjected to the same imperatives of our culture, with which power is to be associated in a Foucauldian analysis (see, section 5.2.2. and 5.3.1.). They are subjected to power and police themselves. Constance said that she enjoys the opportunity to attend other instructors' classes precisely because attending rather than instructing gives her "the chance to check my own technique and make sure I am doing things right".

There are other things that one notices in the gym, which one could view as extensions of the technology of the gaze and facilitators of power. One example of

this is the advertisements of the various exercise programmes in the form of posters and leaflets¹¹⁵. I have shown already (section 5.2.2.) how these posters and leaflets reflected the broader ideals (like health, fitness, good looks, enjoyment) that support people's choices to exercise. Here I am going to refer specifically to how they promote discipline at a practical level within the gym and how they and their messages are debated and negotiated by the interviewees¹¹⁶.

The posters were illustrations often large enough in their dimensions to cover a wall from top to bottom. They usually pictured people training: running, cycling or participating in the most popular classes. Smiling, inviting faces and perfectly defined bodies, dressed in the latest sports wear would attract the attention of anyone coming into the area. They also gave the impression that acquiring this type of body or doing exercise as effortlessly and pleasurable as people depicted was indeed possible. The slogans that escorted the images ranged from the classical, Olympic: "faster, stronger, higher" to the more modern and fashionable "looking good and feeling great". Other typical slogans included: "this is the ultimate [stepping or aerobic or something equivalent] experience", or the more inspired and persuasive: "WARNING: This class is going to change the shape of your body". People noticed these messages and were often attracted by them: "Have you seen what it says? Oh, it's true. It's so true!" Constance shouted out pointing to this last 'warning sign', when I prompted her to talk to me about the effects of doing the Body Training Systems on her body. The shape of her body has changed a lot since she started doing the Bodystep, Bodypump and Bodycombat, she reported.

Others, however, were more hesitant to find any truth in what the posters show, juxtaposing their own experiences with their messages:

¹¹⁵ On how influential these visual representations often are in shaping our views of the world (and in our case reconfirming the ideals that force people to the gym or guaranteeing that people will get the virile bodies they want), see also Jewitt, 1997; and, of course, much of the feminist literature discussed in Chapter 3; also, see Ball and Smith (1992). I have chosen to include posters and leaflets under the gaze theme, rather than under spatiality, because although they occupy a certain space they are more importantly visual representations and are discussed for their effects as such by the interviewees themselves.

¹¹⁶ On how meaning is encoded in the structure of the images see Jewitt (1997: 1.3).

I mean look at them, they are so unreal; when you exercise you sweat, you become ugly, your hair gets in a mess, you stink ... would you think people would go to these programmes if they showed all that?

This is what Lisa asked me, further arguing that it was all a marketing trick:

I think it's all one industry fitting into the other. The clothing industry for instance, you know, they are trying to sell all those gym-gears, so you've got to have the latest little crop-top, so they are going to show it to you in a way that you think: 'oh, nice', you know. 'I can at least buy the clothes, I may not have the body but at least if I buy the outfit I am going to be part of the way to looking that good'. It's the whole image thing. It might not be about the exercise ... I mean the majority of people in Bodypump are wearing old T-shirts with holes in them and in general comfortable clothes but if you look at the pictures that are advertising the Bodypump classes, it's all latest designer gear. You know it's probably made by the same company that makes the Bodypump system and I think some people are fooled into saying: 'oh, I can't look that good but at least if I buy the clothes, I am half way there, to looking like that'. But on the other hand that's what I like about actually going to Bodypump ... It's not about image. The majority of the people there, I'd say everybody apart from who conducts the class, everybody is wearing what they are comfortable wearing and there is not pressure to go wearing the latest gear and to spend a fortune on the clothes just to have the image to be doing the class. You get more of that in the gym though. More people in the gym are worried about what they are wearing, because I think there is more posing around in the gym.

To Lisa the difference between what actually happens in the class and what these posters portray is very striking. The way she debated the impact that the images on these posters have on her seemed to nullify the argument that people are easily caught up in discipline. However, her additional remarks that there are other individuals who may be 'fooled' and think that by buying what these posters show as the 'appropriate' gear for training they can 'look good', also proved that she subconsciously acknowledges the operation and effects of the technology of the gaze, as facilitated by the posters, on these other people. Furthermore, Lisa acknowledged the existence of a whole 'network' of relations that is based and depends on the operation of such technologies. And she illustrated graphically that the existence of these posters is a reflection and a constant reminder of the purposes for which one goes to the gym, by saying how people hope to be 'part of the way to

looking good' by imitating what they see in these posters. This incidentally implied that there is a certain aesthetic ideal that these posters promote.

Her words, however, as well as Constance's, ultimately prove that we do look at these posters, albeit in variant ways. My experience from the field has also shown that a simple glance at them was often enough to bring an exercising individual back to the order of training, if he or she was trailing.

But these illustrations and messages did something more than this. Seemingly addressing our minds and finding their epitome in the motto "mind over matter", they became the means through which, as Foucault would put it, power would find its way back to, and would be exercised on our bodies (DP: 29). These images seize us – our souls and ultimately our flesh; they move us – lead us to feel and act. They lead us to subjecting ourselves to discipline in variant ways and to various degrees. (On the power of images, see also Valier, 2004: 251, 253.)

As I have said, most of this visual material (posters, in particular) was in fact quite impressive. During the early phases of observation, I would also find myself looking at it for long periods but as I have just shown I was not the only one to whom these images seemed so imposing and remarkable.

What I also noticed was that the posters are usually displayed in the equipment rooms, where people train on their own. Indeed it was probably there that they are most necessary to remind us of what we should be doing, where the presence of the disciplinarians-instructors is scarcer. They also decorate the walls in the classrooms, but there they were not as useful because there the presence of professional trainers guaranteed the operation of discipline. Standing with their backs to the mirror and with all of us facing them, instructors would constantly remind us with their instructions or comments – 'good work', 'people you look great tonight', 'OK, lunges next, this is for those who wear high heels and want to have nice legs', 'stay strong with me' – of the reasons why we were there, much as the posters would do in their absence. They reminded us of the value of fitness, good looks, but also hard work and so on.

Discipline through gazing was also facilitated in another way. This time looking took the form of reading specific advice on how to do the exercises. In fact, many people who train get information about how to work out from the media.

Kostas said: “Because of what is said in the media, you get the impression that machines can actually help you have an overall workout”. Similarly Norman revealed:

For the most part I like the free weights because I find I get better results with them; because, you know, the way the machines work they are all designed to isolate certain muscles, whereas with the free weights not only you have a full sense of all the work – you have to rely more on balance – and I found but *also from what I have been told and from what I read about*, they really provide you with a better work out. Because all smaller muscles are worked out as well. [Emphasis added]

These comments illustrate that the promotion of exercise as discipline may be achieved in a variety of ways employed by a wide range of institutions rather than only the gym. The media – particularly the printed ones in the case just illustrated – play an important role in the circulation of ideals but also in promoting particular forms of discipline as well. The preoccupation of all these institutions and groups of people with exercise further reflects the wide spread of the particular disciplinary technologies across the whole of society and seems to verify both the existence of the carceral continuum that Foucault speaks about and the various forms in which power operates.

All these made me think that Foucault’s arguments on the impact of the gaze quite accurately represented what was happening in the social world (of the gym). Yet there were also comments (like Lisa’s previously) or tactics (like Betty’s to stay at the back of the class) or attitudes which made me think that people always find ways to neutralize or minimize the impact of these technologies on them; in other words, people seemed to be able to resist the operation of discipline. We may recall that identifying such techniques is not something that Foucault had extensively done (see discussion in section 1.1.4. and 2.3.), but interviewees’ behaviours and remarks seem to be enough to help me fill this gap and illustrate in what sense resistance to discipline may be possible. I will discuss this more analytically in the next section.

6.3. The Effects of Disciplinary Power

So far I have been referring to the ways in which discipline operates within the gym. I have also shown that the gym is a disciplinary institution in the Foucauldian sense, in that it regulates individuals' behaviours, the movements of their bodies, organizes their time, and promotes and facilitates further the expansion of the nexuses of power in their multiple forms that I discussed in Chapter 5, through surveillance. It reconfirms the ideals and allows them to be reproduced even outside its narrow limits.

This analysis has often further indicated that training in the gym is very hard discipline. For many, as I have shown, it was the need to control their desires that forced them to this venue. Interviewees often admitted that they are pressured to exercise because they have internalised certain rules of behaviour, for instance, that it is unhealthy to eat so much or drink too much, or not just unhealthy but also less graceful – not aesthetically pleasing, and so on. They want to make up for eating too much or having a body that looks or is unhealthy or overweight by exercising. They feel pressured to exercise in order to acquire a body type that is acceptable and does not violate the aesthetics of a 'controlled' appearance or the rules about health and fitness. They feel pressured to exercise in order to comply with certain social standards.

Yet, in many instances throughout this analysis, I have also had the opportunity to show that exercise for people is often more than a matter of becoming beautiful, healthy and so on. I have had the opportunity to show that people enjoy exercise: they clap for their achievements, they smile after coming out of the classes. And this again is not only because exercise meets their 'expressive demands' for as long as they are there, i.e. that while in the gym they can feel happy with the music, with meeting other people and so on. It is more than this. It is the appreciation of a whole other range of effects that the exercise of power has upon them and on their bodies that makes the interviewees enjoy training and want to continue doing it. In other words, it is the appreciation of the positive values of exercise. To these I will now turn.

6.3.1. *The Power/Knowledge Combination and Effect: a) Knowledge and the Negotiation of Mandates, b) Excess and Non-excess, c) Resistance*

For Foucault subjection to power is a practice that is not solely repressive but is also productive, in that it creates knowledge both about power relations themselves but also about the individual subjected to it. This knowledge enables people to appreciate social life. It opens up for us a wide range of options for action and practice with which we can further experiment. In their multiplicity, both force relations and knowledge grant people a sense of choice, a sense of self-awareness, a sense of awareness of where they stand in the world and of freedom. These are all issues that Foucault discusses more extensively in THS. One could ask if this is a valid assumption that Foucault makes about the operation of power. Let us see if we can find analogous experiences in interviewees' narratives. Let us investigate the 'empowering experiences' (as Whitson would call them, 1990: 28) that exercise presents them with.

a) Knowledge and the Negotiation of Social Mandates: Many gym users after years of training often come to change their minds about what exercise offers them or change the way they exercise. Many of the interviewees admitted that although when they started they were aiming at acquiring a body beautiful, now they might be doing exercise because they want to be healthy (Kostas, Maggie, Luke). Others said that exercise has shown them how far they can go and has taught them to avoid excesses because they are definitely going to be detrimental for them (Norman, Jonathan, Sherah). Overall and ultimately, subjecting themselves to the discipline of exercise has given interviewees the ability to debate the influence they have, and the social mandates that have forced them to the gym in the first place. Most of them become aware of the many benefits of exercise. They are not simply caught up in mechanisms of power applied externally, blindly following the various social norms regarding appearance or health or fitness and so on. But being part of the nexuses of power themselves, they can produce their own interpretations and 'create' their own standards of beauty, health and 'proper' training itself, and are aware of these opportunities that exercise gives them; things which outsiders might never imagine

that the majority of gym-goers could do. Many of them admitted, for example, to having come to terms with their appearance and now understanding that probably not even rigorous exercise can change their body shape much. As Constance argued:

[When I was younger and saw those magazines] I didn't understand that everybody's shape is different and – you know – I'll never have a flat belly. My belly, that's where all my fat goes, to the front of me. If my belly was flat, then I would be stick-thin everywhere else. Exercise has taught me that.

It is so that she has managed to overcome the anorexia that she had been suffering from since she had seen that picture of a model in a magazine and wanted to look like her.

Kostas says that exercising has given him the opportunity to appreciate a greater number of body shapes and images. When he first started training, we saw he wanted to get a slim body just because he thought it was beautiful. So the influence of his peers made him believe. That exercise gave him the knowledge to re-evaluate the various social ideals is evident in what he said:

Of course, you look at them and compare yourself to them [other people exercising in the gym] and especially when you are younger, you are getting impressed by some of them and what they do. You see body-builders for instance and although some of them may look gross and ugly, others look really spectacular and you aspire to be like them. But gradually you understand how many substances they take in order to achieve those results and get bodies like these and you don't want to be like that anymore.

Now that he is training for different reasons, he has grown to like different types of bodies, as long as they are bodies that are worked on he added. Exercise has also given him the opportunity to have a better understanding of himself:

I mean it allows you to understand who you are, to feel your body, to consciously understand who you are and this is not easy when you are younger.

He continued:

I don't know how else I could have achieved this understanding of myself but through exercise I have managed to do it. I can feel it. I feel that I have a better understanding of what I am and what I am not.

Acquiring this sense of personhood, understanding who he is, he further told me, is not only a matter of simply knowing, in his mind, what he is capable of or measuring his mind's achievements, it is also a bodily and a bodily awareness issue. Through subjecting his body to training, he has learnt how he can go forward in life and deal with the problems that life might bring. In "keeping my limits, I can endure things", he says. This knowledge that exercise has offered him is very important.

Getting knowledge through training and experimenting with it further implies not only appreciating a wider range of things but also getting knowledge about the dangers associated with exercise and about how these dangers can prevent one from reaching one's aims. People become aware of the dangers of exercise to health or beauty (one might become so skinny that is no longer aesthetically pleasing for instance and be no longer desirable or might become overtly muscular which is not appreciated by many, either):

I have seen people who have fantastic bodies torturing themselves and going beyond the limits – I mean like girls who become terribly skinny and that's not aesthetically nice anymore (Kostas).

Interviewees are aware of these detrimental effects; for example, of the fact that if they were to build bulging muscles, they would have to take substances that could in fact be harmful for them. They have come particularly to appreciate this in the course of exercise and given that they want to have their bodies 'in the long run', they avoid such practices.

We see then how the people involved in exercise are able, precisely because of this involvement, to negotiate the effects of training in various ways and are able after much consideration to appreciate these effects. They are not the cultural dupes they are often presented to be in literature.

Involvement with exercise, involvement with power helps people appreciate the particulars of discipline in themselves, as well. People learn what the value of

regulating each move, gesture, of the importance of timetables, and of what they enable them to do. In this sense, many of them come to appreciate, for instance, the value of ‘total’ training, as we saw earlier (section 5.6.).

But they negotiate the whole training process and experience, as well. Another instructor reminds us that there is a whole industry supported by the existence of the various training programmes. She argued: “[every new thing they advertise] is only a way of making a bit of extra money. In reality” – she added – “there is only so many things you can do with an exercise”. Participants often express similar views:

I mean it’s not only that exercise is good for you. You can realise that the gym and the whole tradition of exercising is a certain industry that needs to be supported, instructors find jobs, former athletes find jobs, people find jobs at the reception of the gym, cleaners and it is related to fashion industry as well, special clothes are made, etc. These people need to get paid.
(Maria)

Having seen how the knowledge about their abilities and the knowledge about exercise that they acquire on the whole, enables interviewees to appreciate training, but also negotiate it and reflect on it and avoid excesses (a process that reminds us of the introspection that Foucault introduces as a prerequisite of resistance in THS, vol. 3: 89; also section 2.2.3.), let us now turn to see how they actually define excess and non-excess.

b) Excess and Non-Excess: It was not easy to identify what sort of behaviour might be excessive in interviewees’ minds. And it was also not easy to establish whether their interpretation of excess matched Foucault’s definition of the concept and to investigate if his was an accurate reflection of others’ views and practices and of social reality. The difficulty is proven by the fact that a range of attitudes are described by different people as excessive.

We may recall that to outsiders, for instance, the practice of going to the gym is itself an excess. ‘Natives’ of the gym have their own definitions of the concept. They offered their explanations of it when I asked them to describe to me the manner in which they exercise. They expressed the following views. Albert said in a way that highlighted the difficulty of giving meaning to excess:

I mean, I exercise aggressively but then again what to me might be excessive might be the other person's style and everyday way of life and vice versa.

Still, in his words we may identify that *aggression* may be an aspect of excess. In other words, it is trying to do everything at once or pushing oneself beyond the limits *unnecessarily*. Kostas said:

I mean, I have never tried in one evening, in one session, to see how far I can go but whenever I was less tired, I would usually come to realise that I could do more than I could think of; more repetitions or more press-ups or something.

Norman commented:

I exercise quite hard, I push myself to the limit at the point and at the time that I exercise but I know my limits. I know that if I go any further I am going to hurt myself, if I go any further than this it doesn't help me in any way, I don't need to lift this extra weight in order to do what I am planning to do.

Maggie added:

I think for endurance you have to push yourself but you have to know what your limits are; this is where injury, if you go over that line, if you cross that line, that's when injuries occur. And this is where people often don't know where to stop. If you feel pain, real pain, then you should stop. The saying 'no pain, no gain' is not right.

Apart from causing to oneself undue pain, excess may also be defined as the absence of a healthy attitude towards the way of constructing the body and a 'healthy', non-excessive attitude to one's existence overall. I asked Maggie about what reasons she would find it acceptable to miss exercise and she replied:

I would turn down the class to go to a party or whatever because I am not so *obsessive* with my exercise that I feel it's worth giving up my social life for it. I feel it's a time and a place for both but I wouldn't, I certainly wouldn't let exercise take over my life as I know it's happened to a lot of people. I think it's the healthy balance I look for.

We may remember Luke's comment that "there are better things for one to do than spending all day looking at oneself in the mirror" (section 4.6.).

Let us look at another narrative that can help us understand how a healthy attitude may be gradually formulated through the process of training but also how the knowledge one gains from training can help one understand where excess lies¹¹⁷. Kostas said again remembering his first days at the gym:

You first appear in this place that you are not familiar with and you see all these people who seem to know what they are doing. Of course, many of them are there to look at themselves in the mirror and show off. They usually have a particular gait, as well. I could never imagine that all this thing going on there was 'artificial' and that many of the people that I saw and admired were really insecure people, but my feeling was that I was entering a club – a ghetto – of people that really felt good about their bodies and I wanted at some point to feel the same.

By artificial he meant excessive, he explained, in that he saw that these people had goals that were in reality unreachable and took various substances to enable themselves to meet their aims to acquire for example big muscles (see, also section 5.2.3.). Their behaviour is further excessive in that it shows that for these people the pursuit of an ideal was becoming an aim in itself and they were unable to appreciate anything else. He juxtaposed it with the behaviour that athletes have towards their bodies and told me:

Excessive to me was when I saw people walking with a certain style and looking around to see if people were looking back at them. I mean, it's the style of the person who has spent hours and hours exercising, no question about it, but has not much else to show and feels this incredible need to feel confident through the gaze of others. ... I, as an athlete could see that there are so many different body-types and there are people who are toned and impressive

¹¹⁷ The importance of health and healthy living and the risk of taking specific drugs are also discussed by bodybuilders themselves and are presented in Monaghan et al., 2000. Apparent in many of their accounts is an emphasis on health and living a healthy lifestyle. Stigmatised activities such as drug-taking are sometimes legitimated by bodybuilders' emphasis on the "instrumentality of these drugs and by observing sub-cultural proprieties and tolerated licenses that are appropriate to the status 'bodybuilder'" (6.4.). But activities like these are also said to be risky, particularly where drugs are potentially to be used expressively for sensual hedonism" (6.6.) and not for their physique enhancing benefits.

but in so many different shapes. And I could see that athletes are not people who show off their body; they have learnt to be at terms with the reality of their profession and the reality of hard training and usually had a much healthier attitude towards their bodies.

I asked him to analyse what he meant when he said that athletes have a 'healthier attitude' towards their bodies. He had told me previously in our conversation that it is the athletes who often reach their limits when training. I asked him to explain to me in what sense this 'reaching of the limits' may not be an excessive but a healthy attitude, instead. It was surprising that he made such a differentiation knowing how harmful exercise for the sake of athleticism and championship had been for him. I ask him to clarify this. He replied:

Coaches push you to the limits of exhaustion but that's not the same. Here we are talking about improving your standards in a sport. The aim of the athlete is to get better and improve every time and this implies that you are going to push yourself to the limits and the coach is there to exercise pressure on you to do that. I mean their philosophy about the body and about body image is different. The athlete has a sense of self-confidence because he has spent all this time on his body. He or she is asking for something more. It's not making a nice body simply for having a nice body, that can be looked at and make him or her feel better, but the body is for the athlete the means for achieving a better, higher goal. That's why I feel that we [as athletes] did not care so much about being looked at because our satisfaction or sense of achievement was deriving from elsewhere; i.e. achieving a better time in a race. I, as an athlete, was seeking something completely different from what the show-offs in the gym did.

However, one might want to ask: is the behaviour that Kostas describes as excessive (the preoccupation with one's image and showing off one's beautiful body) an attitude that Foucault would also characterise as such? To the extent that it signifies purely a preoccupation with another ideal (the pursuit of beauty) than Kostas has in mind (he appreciates health more instead), probably not. But to the extent that it illustrates that the preoccupation with whatever ideal takes over the individual, the answer should probably be yes. The other phrases that interviewees use to describe excess (exercising aggressively or unnecessarily) also indicate that the pursuit of an ideal has become excessive and has taken over the individual. Thus they could probably fit under Foucault's definition of the concept. We may remember that excess in a Foucauldian sense implies an overall attitude towards

one's being (towards one's exercising body and self, in this case) that would show that the pursuit of an ideal is prohibiting one from constantly evaluating, negotiating and understanding one's existence. In other words, one is becoming "a slave of one's desires" (Foucault in Bernauer and Rasmussen, 1988: 8). This type of behaviour would also be unethical in Foucault's view, as it would prevent somebody from relating to others (understanding oneself in relation to others in the world) and constructing further oneself as a work of art. Overall this is a type of behaviour that is deemed to do more harm than good as it is a behaviour that illustrates one does not care about others (Bernauer and Rasmussen, 1988: 8; also, section 2.2.3.).

Let us look at some more of the interviewees' definitions of excess that illuminate the aforementioned. Maria, pointing in a rather Foucauldian manner to the relationship between discipline and pleasure and the possibility of discipline turning into pleasure said:

[Exercise is] discipline that can become pleasure, if it's not obsessive, if it's done in good measure. Like not being able to eat if you haven't gone for a run that's a complete obsession for me. I have a friend who does it. I think people are harming their bodies, they are harming themselves this way. What would happen if somebody took that person's exercise away from them? If for some reason that person couldn't run for a week? I think these people would suffer, they would absolutely suffer because that's obsessive. ... I think going for a run and thinking that you are absolutely in control of your body, in this case, is quite laughable really because it shows you are not in control. It is your run or the exercise that you want to do that controls you and not the other way round. Because if you are seeking to do the exercise in order to achieve the control of your body in the first place, then you've actually reached the point where it's all been reversed. You've already lost.

The attitude that Maria described as obsessive is what is often in slang described by other interviewees as a 'freakish' one. Katia gave a definition of who is a 'gym freak' and described the typical behaviour of a person whose passion for having a good body or becoming muscular through exercising has taken over and prevents from evaluating the experience of exercise and its benefits in any other way and only makes them show off. She said:

A gym freak is a person who goes to the gym and takes oneself too seriously for doing so.

She added that these people have all the wrong kind of mentality towards exercise that becomes apparent from incidents like the following, which at times are also extremely funny to the spectator:

They show off, I mean they completely show off. They are the utter gym-freaks. You want an example? Listen. It happened a year ago but I still remember it because it was so funny. I am working out my biceps with this machine, I am in a room full of equipment so you can't do sit-ups or anything on the floor. I mean, if you want to do something like this, you go somewhere else. But there is this guy who first does his biceps and then just falls on the floor and starts doing push-ups, just in front of me, accidentally so to say [laughs ironically]. And he continues doing something else again on the floor and I am like 'if you want to use the floor, why do you come in this room?' He was totally showing off. It was me and a couple of other girls there and he just wanted to show off. And then you have those other guys, who just try to lift so much weight, oh, and they suffer when they try to lift it and they roar 'agrh hh ...' when doing it. I mean, any instructor you'd ask they'd tell you that it is bad for you to do that and it's bad for your body; but still these people ...

James admitted having behaved in an excessive manner occasionally, overdoing it and doing things all the wrong way:

You know there was a time when I was running long distances every day, was not eating enough, not resting and was finding it difficult to stay awake.

These types of behaviour that interviewees describe as excessive or insensible are what Foucault would equally call 'unethical', as I have argued. They show a deep disrespect not only for oneself but also for others. They are unethical to others in that they reveal that one leads a type of life that can be 'harmful' in many instances for the broader whole that is associated with that person. It is indicative of the fact that the person is neglecting others (his whole relations with the group, whose harmony as we have seen is still a social demand, section 5.2.1.), because he or she is so caught up in the pursuit of his/her own aims; it is indicative of the fact that the person does not care about anything but him/herself (analogously, THS, vol. 3: 89). Trevor said:

I don't think there is a perfect body and in any case I would like more to be related to someone who'd look human. Like someone not so obsessed with the gym that would be like the muscle man thing or something like that, that I find repulsive. I don't find that attractive because I suppose I'd think that they would be more obsessed with themselves and their body and would not be a very nice person otherwise.

Avoiding excesses is, then, not only about interviewees making themselves better and constructing their bodies as works of art (taking care of their bodies, understanding and respecting their bodies as materials) but also about them being enabled to relate ethically to others, as Foucault would put it.

c) Knowledge and Resistance: I have shown that in knowing what exercise enables them to do, people also become capable of negotiating the ideals that have brought them to the gym in the first place. This negotiation but ultimately their involvement with power is something that allows individuals to further resist or play with and at the limits of the networks of power and construct themselves as free from them, as Foucault would say. Ulrike, who sometimes complained that she feels she has a 'big' stomach, said:

If I do not touch meat or bread and go to the gym 3 hours a day, you know I might sort of attain the perfect stomach, but I am not ready to give that up because I love my food and I am going to continue eating what I eat today – I am quite happy with who I am and I am not going to do any more sacrifices.

In saying that she is happy with her looks and she will continue to enjoy eating, she is resisting a force that could often lead others to starving themselves in order to acquire a six-pack stomach for instance. She is resisting the ideal that seems to force us all to be toned and lean. Similarly, Constance argues that although she has gained some weight recently, she does not consider this as "a big drama" although in the past she would probably be extremely worried about the fact that she might have put on a kilogram.

We may remember that Foucault associates resistance with power and treats it as an effect and a possibility of power/knowledge. The inherentness of resistance

and the ability to resist overall lies in the knowledges that power creates. (Analogously, THS, vol. 3: 50; also, section 2.2.3.).

Individuals are subjected to power; the ways they construct themselves are effects of the operation of a variety of force relations. But the diversity of the elements of power, the variety of practices that it catches us up in and the multiple knowledges produced, add up to the possibility of resistance. We have seen several times how people debate health or beauty and pleasure, and how detrimental they think the consumption of supplements might be for health or how excessive slimness might undermine the idea of beauty. But we have also seen how people may formulate their resistances to power by negotiating the various aspects of it in relation to each other. Something that might be beautiful might not be healthy.

It seemed to me that respondents could claim that they could resist any of these ideals because they were aware of, valued and negotiated them through the process of training, through subjecting themselves to training.

Exercise has given these people the opportunity to understand these matters and has enabled them to resist rules that demand them to be, for example, muscular or thin, and resist exercise from taking over their existence. It has given them the opportunity to reformulate these rules for themselves. It has allowed them to construct themselves as relatively free subjects who debate and organise their own lives even if they are subjected to a number of force relations. That, in acquiring knowledge, people can control their own compliance with the rules, is also evident in that many see the gym as a safety valve: “You know”, Betty said, “what I try to do is work hard during the week, so I can play hard on the weekend, so I can have a life”. Betty admits to be happy because she is able to do so (‘feels good’) and this is why she ultimately finds pleasure in exercise. We may understand from her quote that she sees discipline as having what Foucault would call a productive effect on her (knowing what she can do, being capable of doing it and feeling good for the fact that she can have a full life).

We have seen briefly though that people may resist also the particular disciplinary technologies (particularly the gaze) themselves and not only the broader social forces that lead them to the gym. They develop attitudes or techniques that may neutralise these mechanisms and weaken their effects. Some bring books and

magazines so that they can read when on bikes and not have to look around, others avoid looking at themselves in the mirrors or others choose to occupy a space at the back of the class (Lisa, Betty and Diana all admitted doing some of these). Others choose to put not as much effort into the exercise as instructors often advise them to do, urging the latter to shout at them that: “It’s not that you can’t do it; it’s that you don’t want to do it”. Others spend much more time ‘posing’ and ‘showing off’ or wandering around the premises, pretending that they are trying the various pieces of equipment rather than actually exercising.

All these behaviours and thoughts of the interviewees and their changing attitudes towards and opinions about exercise reveal the multiplicity of resistances that may develop in complex power situations and against particular disciplinary technologies, as effects of the operation of numerous power relations. The multiple forms that resistance takes, is something that Foucault did not analytically refer to (see sections 1.1.4., 2.3.). But what is most important is that they make us understand precisely that one may resist power and probably more effectively so, only if one partakes in it, as the French philosopher has illustrated and as on many instances my interviewees have shown with their evaluations of the practice of exercise and of what happens in the gym (we may recall how they negotiate posters’ messages or the launch of new or the value of older training programmes, sections 6.2.4. and earlier here). All these demonstrate the flexibility of the carceral network that Foucault describes and the multiplicity of opportunities of resistance that it generates for us, in spite of the fact that it catches us all up in it, in various ways¹¹⁸.

6.4. The Productive Effects of Power and Exercise on the Body

Specific knowledges people acquire about how to do things (through repetition of activities, through organizing their daily lives in routines etc) but also knowledge

¹¹⁸ As for the outsiders to gym culture, we should not think that they are the escapees of the networks and mechanics of power or that they are the only individuals who resist power simply because they do not make use of such facilities. Their comments illustrate that they are in fact aware of the forces that are in operation in society and write their effects upon our bodies. But as I previously argued, in its multiplicity, power is working on their flesh in different ways and forces them to do different things, which would have been impossible to explore in one thesis. The gym constitutes only one venue where we may see power clearly writing the body. And exercise is only one technique that allows us to study how power shapes the body. They were chosen precisely for their clarity.

about life overall and the ability to cope with everything that comes up in life (or at least *the belief* that one is able to cope and deal with whatever comes up in life) are the most important and productive effects of power, in a Foucauldian sense.

In coming to the gym, individuals test their limits, learn their potentials and capabilities, learn to understand and appreciate what they can do and thus find pleasure in the experience of training. They also come to appreciate and acknowledge the value of the particular disciplinary mechanisms in enabling them to become better in whatever they do. They come to value their time and know how to make good use of it, they value surveillance and take advantage of the opportunities that the operation of this technology gives them to compare themselves with others and improve their performances (see Kostas' and Norman's remarks – section 6.2.4.), they appreciate repetition and so on. Most importantly, though, they learn themselves and their bodies (THS, vol. 3: 136, 142; also section 2.2.4.), they become aware of their capabilities and their bodies' potentials but also of their own responsibilities as individuals (i.e. to care about their bodies, about themselves):

I'm a lot more comfortable with my body now than I was when I started coming to the gym. But I think a lot of that is kind of an age thing. I've accepted it. You know I am 31 and I'm never going to be anorexic or have that image, I am never going to be particularly skinny, I am never going to be a size 8 but I am happy with it. I am happy that I am doing something to slow old down, if you like. Your body does change when you get older and it starts to get a bit – you know – but I am happy that I can do something about it. I feel that if I was sitting at home doing nothing, then I can't moan about it ... As long as I am doing something about my body, then I've got only myself to blame if I put on weight or if I am not doing something. If I am not changing things, I can only blame myself. (Lisa)

They further say in a rather Foucauldian manner that they are the ones who can construct themselves as useful:

Well, it really helps to see what you can do. Make sure you work well, this idea of when you finish you've done as much as you possibly could, you've not played around in doing it, you've pushed yourself to the limits and you saw what you are able to do. (James)

All the interviewees reported that they continue to exercise because they like and appreciate its practical effects on them and further see participation in the various programmes as a safety valve for any future deviations from the norm, for “having a life”, for “playing hard”, for doing one’s tasks effortlessly, for enjoying the little treats in which every now and then one wants to indulge and all the little details in life: “Say, I’m pushing a couch around and the last time I pushed it, it felt a lot heavier; now it feels lighter. Cool!” (Norman).

In these statements one can identify all these elements of discipline, knowledge that comes through the experience of training, a sense of duty to do something about one’s body but also the pleasure that comes with participation in the experience and with seeing that one has actually done something worthwhile, of having lived this experience.

6.5. The Lived (Material) Body

I have closed the previous chapter by illustrating what type of body our society needs. What I have tried to highlight in this chapter is how people’s bodies are actually lived by training individuals and how they (their bodies) experience the whole process of exercise. It has become obvious, I believe, that interviewees experience or wish to experience their bodies as strong, muscular, healthy, slim, toned, able to cope and enduring. I have several times shown how exercise enables them to do so. Some of these people for example admitted that they want to build some muscle and they actually manage to achieve that:

I was just sitting here the other day and happened to be doing something and noticed how my biceps had grown and I was like: ‘oh, this looks nice, I have a little muscle here that I couldn’t notice before’,

Katia said. Many others also admitted that they could actually see their bodies changing to becoming healthier, fitter, more beautiful and so on:

My body changed a lot since I started exercising. My abdominals started showing, you know, and I could feel that my capacity to do things also enhanced. I mean when I was running I

could feel that I was running a lot faster, I had stronger legs and usually by the time others were beginning to get tired, I was making a move forward. I mean, I could see the results. At home I would help with the housework and I would be doing this much more easily every time. Of course, I was also doing crazy things, like I would be removing furniture just because I felt I was *strong* enough to do this. I mean it was stupid but still ... [He laughs].
(Kostas)

They see their capacities being enhanced and further acquire a 'total awareness', as Constance would call it, of who they are and what they are. As a friend said, before I even started the interviews:

I mean it's good. You feel you have some muscle in you and you can do something with it. Even when your body is sore, it's good. You know you are made of some substance.

At the same time, by referring to interviewees' reactions to the process of training itself, I have also managed to show how their bodies feel the tediousness of exercise and react to this very process. They feel sore or are in pain when people are training. They feel tired or weak. They prove their 'fragility', as Foucault would call it (THS, vol. 3: 122-4), which interviewees come to appreciate and understand. They, as materials, make individuals not want to go to the gym, and enable them to resist discipline, at the same time that they living the 'buzz' that exercise gives them, with all the chemical reactions that happen within them and the release of endorphins.

All these also point to the fact that our bodies live the world in their own ways. As Maria said: "It is your body that carries you to the world, helps you experience the world; the body [that] is bound to affect you", only to continue – highlighting the very fact that the body lives its own life – that:

[h]owever, our body always escapes our control, our body will never allow us to control it. I think that as soon as we try to control our body and as soon as we go over the line then our body comes back with a vengeance.

It is probably this volatility of the body itself (the fact that it can 'escape' culture) and the awareness of the multiple courses of action that it can follow, the multiple experiences that it lives, that explains why sociology has avoided casting

light on our body matters for so long (section *1.1.4.*). It is probably this understanding that also led Foucault to avoid discussing the body any more analytically in his already complex accounts of the multiple forces and relations that invest it. This is why he probably limited himself to emphasising only the necessity of studying the body in as many contexts as possible.

Studying the gym and exercise, then, has been useful not only for showing what the relations that write the body are, but also what our bodies themselves are capable of doing, how they live life and how they as materials experience our world. In other words, it has been useful in showing how people's bodies are useful and resistant objects, as Foucault would say, and live their own life course independently of the forces that invest them and independently of the purposes that we may have in mind when subjecting them to different forms of discipline.

7. In Conclusion

7.1. A Summary of the Aims and Challenges of this Project

I opened this thesis by arguing that, although our bodies have been the focus of attention of a number of disciplines such as medicine or biology, but also of literature and the humanities for many years, only recently have they begun to earn the interest of social scientists – and sociologists in particular. I have added that it is surprising that it has taken these scholars so long to acknowledge the necessity of studying the body, given the fact that we live with our bodies, interact with others and meet them in common social forums with our bodies and learn to appreciate the value of different social groups, and of ourselves within these groups, with our bodies (section 1.1.1.).

I have argued that not even Foucault, who is credited with initiating the sociological debate about the flesh and highlighting the importance of turning our attention to the body, has always managed to fully reinstate the body into the discussion. I explained that this seeming absence of discussion of a deeply embodied corporeality from the work of Foucault is to be attributed largely to the abstract manner in which he speaks about how various force relations, ever changing social relations, write our flesh and influence the ways we treat our bodies. It is further to be attributed to the fact that Foucault did not adequately and in detail elaborate on the various experiences of our materiality – on how our bodies as objects live the world.

However, I also claimed that his writings could accommodate further interpretations and examples that would allow us to see both how our bodies are socially shaped but also how they live the world and have emphasised the importance of trying to investigate our corporeality (how we treat our bodies but also how our bodies behave and react – also, Shilling, 1993: 106; 2000: 20) in a variety of contexts and situations.

In this thesis, I have attempted to do precisely this – to examine the soundness of Foucault's arguments on the body and to show how the alleged void regarding our materiality (a gap that characterises much of the field of sociology of the body itself, as well) that his theoretical and elusive accounts seem to have left,

may be filled with an account of bodies ‘in action’ – bodies that are shaped by social relations but also bodies that experience themselves disciplines and pleasures, bodies that change, grow, feel tired and suffer but also bodies that enjoy the world, become energetic, active, cope with difficulties, endure. I chose to do this in a space specifically designed for the treatment of our flesh – the gym.

I have also tried to show in this study, though, something else, which is equally rarely discussed extensively by sociological commentators. This is the productive aspects of power and of disciplinary mechanisms as presented by Foucault. Foucault describes power as a productive force that produces knowledge about us, about the worlds we live in about its own operation but also enables us to negotiate its effects and thus liberates us. The study of the gym enabled me to see and show how the subjection of individuals to power – their involvement with it – enables them to acquire such knowledge, to make themselves not only docile but also useful and also free.

I conducted participant observation in two exercise venues and 20 interviews with regular gym-goers as well as informal conversations with outsiders to the gym culture. I attempted to investigate the reasons why people exercise – in other words, to identify the forces and social imperatives that lead them to the gym – and to illustrate how gym-goers perceive of these forces (if at all) – namely, how they make sense of power. I also attempted to examine these people’s relationships with their bodies: how they see their bodies, what they expect from their bodies, what they believe their bodies are able to do, what they see their bodies do and which of their bodies’ capacities they attribute specifically to exercise.

Influenced by Foucault’s argument that ‘nobody can escape power’ and wishing to counter-balance the debate that focuses more on the subjection of the female body to power’s mechanisms (see, Chapter 3) and show how men are also affected by these mechanisms, I have spoken with both women and men and have attempted to investigate also men’s experiences of embodiment, discipline and (em)power(ment) through exercise. I have tried to explore men’s corporeality. Although many often expressed stereotypical views as to why or how people of different sexes exercise, the interviews on the whole revealed no significant

variations as to the reasons why the people that I studied choose to attend the gym or how they train. Thus, issues of gender were not, after all, extensively discussed.

One of the major problems and challenges of this empirical investigation was the design of specific interview questions on the basis of ideas coming from Foucault's complex and theoretical work. I tried to formulate questions in such a way that they would be easily answerable by participants in the study. I felt interviewees should not be bombarded with queries about more abstract notions such as 'power relations' or 'power/knowledge' or 'resistance' or 'the ethics of the self' and so on. Similarly, I was aware that I had to take special care when attempting to identify parallels between interviewees' words and Foucault's accounts. Would the word 'power' for example mean the same thing to interviewees as to Foucault? Would interviewees' presentations of social reality match with or reflect something of his writings? What hints could interviewees' descriptions of 'power' give towards interpreting further Foucault's work? A more practical issue was how to investigate a topic as sensitive as the body and people's perceptions of their bodies.

These problems were overcome by combining participant observation and interviews. The first gave me an idea about what was happening in the gym and how people reacted to the whole process of exercise. The second attempted to clarify these matters by examining how individuals perceived of the common exercise environment and what was taking place within it. It also enabled me to see how each individual experienced the process of exercise through their bodies.

I interviewed eleven women and nine men in total, of different ages, professions, backgrounds and nationalities.

7.2. Findings and Conclusions

More specifically my study has enabled me to find the following in relation to the work of Foucault:

7.2.1. On Power as Multifaceted

Participants in my study exercise mainly for the following reasons: a) they want to be healthy; b) they want to be fit; c) they aspire to meet certain standards of beauty, and d) they exercise for the sake of pleasure (see, Chapter 5). These are reasons, the value of which many non-gym goers also acknowledged in a number of informal conversations.

The wide range of these reasons (and not only beauty, contrary to what the literature on the body often suggests – see section 3.5.), justifies Foucault's characterisation of power as multifaceted and dynamic, as serving a variety of scopes and interests and as working in different ways and in different directions.

The fact that people who do not go to the gym often speak about these imperatives and values as well, is something that further validates Foucault's argument on the multifariousness and omnipresence of power. At the same time, this fact also illustrates the flexibility upon which the carceral network operates. It captures us all in it, it makes us acknowledge the existence and importance of the same – more or less – mandates but also allows us to pursue these mandates in different ways each and helps us understand why, for instance, some people do not go to the gym or why different behaviours and attitudes to exercise become manifest by people who train in the gym (see section 6.3.1.).

7.2.2. On Power as a Cluster of Social Forces

Interviewees revealed further that being healthy, fit, beautiful and finding pleasure in training are imperatives that society informs them about in various ways (through media, through a range of professionals and institutions, through education in schools, through peers) and makes them aspire to (see, sections 4.6., 5.2.2., 5.3.1., 5.4.3. and 5.5.1.).

The interviewees' acknowledgement that these rules are rules that society enforces upon them further proves the inherently social character of power as described by Foucault (section 1.1.3. and 2.1.1.).

7.2.3. On Bodies as Socially Shaped Materials

The fact that in order to be healthy, fit, beautiful and so on means for them working on/with their bodies, additionally, points to Foucault's view that power and society invest our bodies; they make us construct our bodies accordingly, they 'need' us to create our bodies as healthy, as fit, as beautiful, as bodies of pleasure – in other words, 'useful' (section 5.6.). In this sense our bodies are socially shaped materials.

7.2.4. On Power as Internalised and Mechanically Exercised

The acknowledgement of the participants in the study that society enforces these rules upon them, and the fact that they follow these rules by attending the gym but especially the fact that they initially admit that they do so because they want to and not because anyone else has told them to do it, further illustrate – as Foucault maintains – how we internalise broader social norms and discipline ourselves, without being able to tell always that we are actually subjected to this kind of social disciplining. In other words, it shows how we end up exercising power mechanically upon ourselves.

7.2.5. On the Body that Society Needs

In addition to the pressures for a body that is healthy, fit, beautiful or a body of pleasure, all interviewees seemed to acknowledge a further common reason that drives them to the gym. They want to have bodies that are 'worked on', 'looked after', 'taken care of', 'not let go'. Exercise gives them the ability to acquire bodies 'that can cope with anything'.

Their words remind us again of Foucault. They point to the need to make our bodies 'docile and useful' and indicate something about the societies we live in. Foucault illustrates that our societies have become extremely demanding; they are societies that want us to be constantly alert and ready to offer ourselves to its services. These progress and achievement-oriented societies do not easily tolerate wasted human resources (THS, vol. 1: 114). It is important in these societies that everything works in one direction; forwards (also Coward, 1986: 88). And our bodies

need to be made able to cope with the demands of these societies and not impede social progress.

It is thus not surprising that in these societies an ethic of work (manifested even at times when we are not ‘officially’ at work and through activities that aim seemingly at our pleasure and leisure) is what directs our lives.

The fact that the word ‘workout’ is used to describe exercise is also significant for our understanding of our societies’ demands. In these societies our bodies have to be constantly able to perform a variety of tasks and fulfil a number of duties.

One way of constructing our bodies to be able to cope with this wide range of social demands is through subjection to training – to the experience and the discipline of the gym. As Crandall argues (1999), bodies in the gym move “in conjunction with the social and technical machine, according to formats of productivity, efficiency and adequacy”. The bodies in the gym are made productive, efficient, adequate, in a word ‘useful’, as Foucault would also call them.

7.2.6. On Power as a Disciplinary but also as a Productive and Resistant Force

Exercise is indeed ‘hard discipline’. The majority of the interviewees admitted this, even those who said that they trained because they find pleasure in the experience (section 6.1.). Gym-goers subject their bodies to temporal and spatial regulation in the gym and to a wide range of activities, gestures and movements – and to other disciplinary technologies like surveillance.

But in subjecting their bodies to this kind of regulation, interviewees also admitted that they enhance their (bodies’) capacities (section 6.4.). They learn (and see) what they and their bodies are capable of doing. They feel empowered, energised and acquire a sense of ‘total awareness’ of who they are and of what they are able to do. We can say, similarly to Foucault, that they acquire knowledge; knowledge about themselves, knowledge about the world around them and its demands and expectations of them.

This is not to say, however, that participants in the study simply obey the rules that society sets about being healthy, fit or beautiful and having bodies that can

endure and cope and are virile and active. Of course they pursue these rules through training but, precisely because they are subjecting themselves to the kind of discipline that exercise is, they come to negotiate ideas and notions such as health or beauty or fitness. They might find, for instance, that fitness or beauty do not always go hand in hand with health, that being too thin is itself unhealthy or that it is wrong to resort to supplements and other substances in order to build a muscular body. In other words, as people acquire knowledge of how exercise works through exercising, they are able to debate society's rules and make their own interpretations of them; they can reformulate them. To use Foucault, they are able to resist power precisely when experimenting with it and when being caught up in it (section 6.4.).

7.2.7. On the Body as Living and Experienced – Materiality

These 'lessons' that people learn as they subject themselves to discipline, they do not learn only in their minds: their bodies themselves force training individuals to understand what is possible for them to do and what is not, what is healthy or not, what is actually beautiful or not, as their bodies react to exercise and the other disciplines associated with it in their own ways – i.e. grow out of proportion, are in pain, suffer when they are subjected to excessive training or become indeed beautiful and healthy and fit when treated with moderate exercise (section 6.5.).

In talking about the knowledge they acquire about exercise and about how they exercise, interviewees also reported then that they have acquired knowledge about their bodies as materials. They come to *feel* and see their bodies' lives, actions and reactions.

This brings us back to the matter of the body being and acting not only as a social material but also as a pre-social entity, that does not simply experience culture but also lives its own course and informs our actions and reactions and gives back to culture, by forcing us to take it into consideration. It is the body we all have in mind, the body that is always and already there, the body that lives and reacts, the body that makes us aware of its existence in its own ways, when it 'hurts' (us) or when it becomes active, the body whose existence Foucault also acknowledges and abstractly

hints towards but never really analytically discusses (see section 1.1.4.). It is the body that:

is not a provisional residence of something superior – an immortal soul ... – but what leaves a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and become sensitive of what the world is made of (Latour, 2004: 206).

Interviewees prove with their words that: “By focusing on the body, one is immediately directed to what the body has become aware of” (Latour, 2004: 206).

7.3. The Contribution of this Study

By casting attention on what the bodies of regularly exercising individuals mean and (can) do, by looking at why exercising individuals treat their bodies in the gym but also looking at how they feel the pains and pleasures of their bodies, this project has managed to show how we can make up for and fill in the so-called void that many identify in Foucault’s theory – and the discipline of sociology of the body – where the body ‘remains hidden in the text’. My thesis has demonstrated how the body may be understood by regular gym-users as lived and living material (as being acted upon but also acting, reacting or inacting) in the course of exercise. I have shown how these people’s bodies may be understood as juxtaposing their ontology, physiology, physicality, ‘pre-sociality’ (as Lingis would call it, 1999: 304 – section 1.1.4.) or fragility (THS, vol. 3, 122) – in other words, their pains, their capacities and their reactions to the stimuli of the social world but also their volatility (section 6.5.) – with this social world, with culture, with power (Shilling: 1993: 106; also section 1.1.4.). I have shown additionally how these bodies further enable and reproduce social relations as they are the ultimate loci where the effects of these relations are written. I have shown how they are made, but also how they become healthy, fit, beautiful, live pleasure.

In other, words, my project has contributed to taking the study of body matters further by making a more embodied sociological account (an account that shows how our bodies are socially shaped but also how they experience the social

world themselves), as well as providing a fuller and better elaboration of Foucault's work.

I have illustrated how Foucault's writings can accommodate understandings of the body both as social and material by referring to the multiplicity of power relations and disciplines that write their effects on the body (by detecting in the interviewees' narratives a wide range of reasons why these people train) and by looking at the individuals' bodies' reactions to these effects and the 'abilities' they are presented with by the operation of these effects.

My study has illustrated, then, that in spite of their high abstraction, Foucault's accounts may constitute a useful enough basis for the further development of a truly embodied sociology. Conversely, I have shown that we can better make sense of our corporeality if we use as a starting point of reference the work of Foucault and elaborate on it further by looking at how we treat our bodies and at how our bodies behave in different contexts and situations in our everyday lives, like – for example – in the gym.

I have also pointed out that people acquire knowledge through the subjection of their bodies to discipline; knowledge about the process of training itself, about their bodies, about themselves, about their position in the world, about their responsibilities and, most importantly, their capabilities and capacities. By appreciating these *knowledges* as they are felt on their bodies, people come to negotiate and be liberated from the forces that aim at regulating their lives (or even oppressing them and rigidly regulating their bodies' actions) at first sight.

Thus, I have shown additionally in my study that the interviewees' narratives do not point only to the fact that people live with their bodies and live their bodies, but that the multiple and variant experiences of treatment of their bodies and the knowledge they gain about how themselves and their bodies can be made useful as told in their stories, allow us further to argue that Foucault was correct in identifying 'positivity' and 'pleasure' in discipline, and ultimately referring to power both as a regulating but also as a productive, positive force (see sections 2.2.1., 6.3.1. and 6.4.).

7.4. Further Research Suggestions

For all the contribution of my study, it is certain that further research should complement and extend it.

Studying the body in a greater number of more varied contexts (but possibly returning to the gym as well) is necessary, so that more embodied experiences come to light. Revealing further how embodiment is understood in different contexts and how our bodies react to the various stimuli of a complex social world is also of major importance. This will make the sociology of the body more fully embodied.

Identifying other relations that might write their effects upon the flesh than the ones I have presented here, or illustrating other modes in which power may be operating or experienced, or identifying differential responses, practices and resistances to these same forces that I have spoken of might also be useful for the same reason as above.

Studying more specific cultures and the impact they have on the formation of perceptions about the body, might also help in this direction but also to our better understanding of differences between the ways our bodies are treated.

Encouraging research on the body using various tools, from interviews and observation to discourse analyses (posters, advertisements, magazines, instructions for the use of different products for the body and so on) might also help enhance our understanding of how wider perceptions about the body may be circulated and influence us.

Further, examining gender issues symmetrically can also prove useful for our understanding of what our contemporary societies need and how they operate.

Finally, viewing the body as a site of great potential rather than something which limits individuals or simply ‘carries us around’ and attempting to identify its multiple capabilities and capacities is expected to contribute further to the understanding of who we are, to making sense of our identities. All these need to be done because, as many of my interviewees’ admitted, we live with our bodies, ‘we are our bodies’.

APPENDIX A

[ADDRESS]

Sept. 2002

[ADDRESS]

Dear ...,

My name is Dimitra Laspia and I am a doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh, Department of Sociology (Science Studies Unit), specialising in the field of Sociology of the Body. I am also a member of [the OLYMPICO] with a peak-hour membership card.

I am carrying out research on men's and women's attitudes towards training and towards their bodies and on their experiences from exercise in the gym.

My research aims at showing what social standards the regular users of the gym try to comply with when they make use of the facilities provided and what social imperatives, needs or perceptions inform their behaviours towards their bodies. I look at the 'whys', that lie behind their choices to exercise.

For the accumulation of my data I am planning to interview people who attend the OLYMPICO. I intend to ask them about their aims and objectives when training, their feelings at the time of exercise and afterwards and their perceptions about their bodies and body-images.

I am writing therefore to ask for your permission to advertise my project in the gym with flyers and posters and by informing people myself and calling them to participate in my study.

I would also like to ask if there is a possibility that I could be allowed to use some space or book a room for conducting the interviews. I would appreciate it if you could let me know of any charges. I expect the conversations to last about two hours.

Attached I have copies of the poster and the flyers, that I am planning to use in order to advertise my work.

I would like to thank you in advance for dealing with my request.

I am looking forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Training on your own?

With a partner?

With other fellows?

Enjoying exercise? Feeling good?

Are you in control of your body?

Interested in participating in a study and sharing your knowledge and experiences?

Keep on reading, then ...

THE PROJECT

*The study is part of a research of a student at the Faculty of Social Sciences
of the University of Edinburgh.*

**The project looks at our attitudes towards our bodies
and tries to analyse our experiences of exercise
in the gym.**

**It examines the 'whys' of training,
and the aims of all of us,
who make use of the facilities provided
and the programmes offered by the gym.**

**It also looks at our feelings,
during and after exercise
and at our perceptions of our images
and appearances, overall.**

**Data will be collected by
(hour-long lasting) individual interviews.**

So ...

- **If you are a (more or less) regular user of the gym or attend any of the classes,**
 - **If you are over 18 (irrespective of your sex or nationality),**
 - **If you have a spare hour in the morning or in the evening,**
- **If you would like to share your knowledge and experiences on the topic,**

**contact ...
at ...**

NOTE:

**All information that you will provide will be treated in utmost confidentiality.
Pseudonyms will be used instead of your real names, in the project, whenever it will be
needed.**

Training on your own?

With a partner?

With other fellows?

Enjoying exercise?

Feeling good?

Are you in control of your body?

Interested in taking part in a study
and sharing your knowledge
and experiences from exercise?

For more information pick a flyer.

Let your friends, also
know about the project and

invite them to participate.

APPENDIX B

A few personal questions (ice-breaking):

Age, family status, educational background, hobbies.

Specific questions regarding the gym and the interviewees' experiences from exercise

- *When did you first start coming to the gym and why?*

Is there any particular reason, any incident that influenced your decision?

- *How often do you go to the gym?*

How many hours do you exercise?

Which time of the day do you dedicate to exercise? Why?

- *What do you do, when you are in the gym?*

What sorts of exercise do you do?

Why would you choose these as opposed to others? Why do you train certain parts of your body?

Are you exercising alone or do you participate in classes, too? Which ones? Why? Why not?

When in a class, what place do you usually pick to stand and why?

Do you have a personal instructor? Why? Why not?

What is about these forms of exercise that you do that makes them pleasing?

- *What are your objectives?*

What do you want from your body?

- *What are your limits?*

Have you ever felt that you have reached your limits, when exercising?

How far would you be ready to go?

- *How do you feel when you are in the gym?*

Do you look at what other people do?

Do you suspect that other might also be looking at you?

How conscious are you about it? How do you feel? How do you react?

- *Could you narrate to me a good and a bad experience from exercise?*

What is it that makes it a good or a bad experience for you?

- *How do you feel afterwards; after you have finished exercising?*

Do you feel your body or your mood changing?

- *For what reasons would you turn down the opportunity to exercise?*
- *Can you envisage the gym as being part of your daily routine in the future?*

What could/has stopped you in the past from exercising?

What would your alternatives to exercise in the gym be? Do you take up any other exercise, outside the gym? Do you do any other sports? Which are these and why?

What other things could you do, if you did not go to the gym?

Why would you think other people go to the gym?

- *How much of your life does exercise take up and why?*

Has exercise been always a part of your life?

The interviewees' relationships with their bodies (body biographies):

- *What springs to mind, when you hear the word "body"?*

How would you describe your relationship to your body?

What do you expect from your body, overall, not only with regard to exercise?

- *How do you feel about your body, overall?*

How do you think others see you?

How do you see yourself?

Which are your personal standards regarding the way you look?

Do you care about what other people think of the way you look? How much? What do you do about it?

Do you look at other people? What do you look at? What do you notice about their bodies?

What do you believe the ideal look regarding the male and the female body, respectively, is?

Asking interviewees how they felt during the interview.

Summarising what interviewees have said.

Thanking people for participating.

APPENDIX C

Consent form

I herewith declare
that I have been already informed about Dimitra's study and agree to
participate in it.

Date

Signature

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